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THE LADY OF
NEVILLE COURT



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A TALE OF THE TIMES



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THE
LADY OF NEVILLE COURT.

A Tale of the Times.

BY
THE AUTHOR OF 'MARION HOWARD,'
ETC. ETC.



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PREFACE.

THE following story is too simple to need any introductory words. The author, however, gladly avails herself of the fair excuse of a Preface to express her thanks to the priest who kindly looked over the passages wherever a point of the Faith had been brought in. She has also to acknowledge the material service rendered to her story by an Irish gentleman, who patiently revised and corrected the phraseology of Tim Murphy and his friends.

The writer ventures to express a hope that the indulgent readers of *Marion Howard* may be tempted to make acquaintance with the *Lady of Neville Court*.

Bayswater, Christmas 1876.

THE LADY OF NEVILLE COURT :

A Tale of the Times.

CHAPTER I.

ONE fine summer morning, somewhere about the year of grace 1841, a very grand wedding took place in Dublin. The bridegroom on the occasion was a certain Sir Morcar Neville, an Irish baronet, possessed of a large estate; the bride, a young lady of gentle birth, though somewhat slender means, whose beauty, talents, and good fortune made her the envy of half the girls in Dublin. Very grand were the festivities, very elaborate the toilettes, very proud and happy the bridegroom. And yet—as the newly-made bride stepped from her husband's handsome carriage into a Protestant church, there to repeat the vows already registered before God's altar (a practice then required by law)—a very heavy shadow fell upon the scene in the eyes of the angels, and that was the shadow cast by that dreariest and darkest of all desolating influences—a mixed marriage.

Sir Morcar Neville was a Protestant, Margaret Delaney a Catholic; and in some way this incongruity seemed to

infuse itself into every circumstance and detail of the day; for, notwithstanding its parade, the wedding was anything but a pleasant one. The greater part of the guests were strangers to each other, and such of Sir Morcar's relatives as honoured the breakfast with their presence showed only too plainly by their manners that they saw little in the bride except her religion and her poverty—in their eyes two very grave disadvantages indeed. Prejudiced, therefore, as they were against her, we need not inquire into the truth of a whisper that circled round in the immediate neighbourhood of those worthies. Whatever business it may have been of theirs, it is certainly none of ours, to question to what extent the broad lands of Ballycross had influenced Margaret Delaney in her choice. True it was that more than one Irish gentleman of her own faith, younger and handsomer than the Baronet, had laid his fortune at her feet; but doubtless she had weighed well the merits of each ere rejecting him for her wealthier suitor, and had only given her hand where she had already given her heart.

Margaret Delaney, not to give her the title still so new and unfamiliar to her ear, was, and had been almost from her infancy, an orphan. The years generally passed by other children at their mother's knee had been spent by her in a convent. Still, so tenderly had the good Sisters supplied her mother's place, that the child had hardly understood her loss until she had gone forth from the asylum of her childhood to find herself a barely-tolerated inmate of the house of a near though unkind relative, who regarded her as a burden, and treated her accordingly. But this unhappy home was not destined to be

hers for long. In the convent, Margaret had formed a strong affection for one of her companions, Helen Bourke. Helen as ardently returned it, and the intimacy thus contracted proved the beginning of a life-long friendship. It passed out into the world with them, grew with their growth and strengthened with their strength ; and when, while both were still in their teens, Helen gave her hand, with her heart in it, to a certain Dr. O'Meara, this very circumstance, instead of severing their friendship, proved the very means of cementing it more closely. So Dr. O'Meara, prudent middle-aged man that he was, feeling that his 'child-wife' was too young and inexperienced to be suffered to pass long hours, sometimes days, alone, during his absence on his professional duties, encouraged Margaret's visits to his house by every means in his power ; and when his domestic happiness was crowned by the birth of a son, he declared that her companionship had now become absolutely indispensable to her friend, and implored her to come to them altogether.

Margaret accepted the invitation so cordially given, and beneath Dr. O'Meara's hospitable roof spent some of the happiest years of her life. Nor had the doctor ever cause to regret the step he had taken ; for in her solicitude for his wife and devotedness to his child, Margaret amply repaid him for his kindness. Helen considered herself more than happy in the society of her beloved friend, while as to the son and heir, Master Richard O'Meara, he positively seemed to possess two mothers, equally solicitous for his comforts, and equally patient in gratifying his whims. And a ruthless little tyrant he was ; but whether he hammered them with his corals or scratched their faces,

it would have been difficult to decide which of the two submitted most cheerfully to the torture, or which rewarded the torturer with the sweetest kiss.

But, as time went on, a measure of worldly wisdom tinged even Helen O'Meara's unsophisticated little heart, and she began to say to herself that, pleasant as this state of things might be for her, it was not altogether what it ought to be for Margaret. Possessing, herself, such a husband as she did, single blessedness in no way constituted Mrs. O'Meara's idea of happiness; and from the moment that the fact dawned upon her that Margaret was no longer in the first flush of her youth, the one desire of her heart began to be to see her well and happily married. The first thing to be done, however, was to discover the lady's taste in the matter. In the most quiet manner possible, therefore, this little unselfish would-be matchmaker took a sly bird's-eye glance round the circle of her husband's friends; but when she afterwards adroitly twisted the conversation to each in turn, she discovered to her surprise that at one time or another Miss Delaney had rejected almost every one.

She therefore very decidedly, though very unwillingly, settled it in her own mind, there and then, that her darling Margaret meant to live and die an old maid, and it was with no inconsiderable astonishment that she heard some months later, upon Margaret's return from a visit to the west of Ireland, that she had accepted an offer made to her while there. Still greater was Helen's surprise when Margaret revealed the name and quality of her new suitor, and deep her satisfaction at the thought of the brilliant future that unfolded itself before her friend. No sooner,

however, did she learn the fact that the gentleman in question was a Protestant than her delight was changed into the deepest alarm. With tears in her eyes she besought Margaret not to be blinded by a prospect of worldly prosperity, but to select a husband of her own faith, however unostentatious his position in life might be. Dr. O'Meara, as far as he dared, added his solicitations to hers; but all to no avail. For their representations were met by Margaret's one argument—her implicit confidence in the good faith of her lover. It was a matter in which they had no right to interfere further; and although the minds of both husband and wife were filled with many and gloomy apprehensions, they were compelled to acquiesce with the best grace they could, and tried to reassure themselves in the honour of Sir Morcar.

But if Margaret Delaney had made a grave mistake in accepting Sir Morcar, she committed another no less grave in the plan she adopted with regard to her religion during the twelve months' courtship that ensued. For although in heart a steadfast, even pious, Catholic, partly from timidity, partly from motives of delicacy, she kept her religion during the whole of this period entirely in the background. It was not that she intended in any way to deceive him—nothing was farther from her thoughts; but she foolishly and fondly imagined that his love for herself so far predominated over every other sentiment that, once married, she should find no difficulty in converting him. But to do Sir Morcar justice, he was by no means as indifferent to his religion as Margaret supposed; on the contrary, he was a very decided Protestant. Margaret's Catholicism, however, gave him very little concern.

So convinced was he of the pliability of her disposition, and of the fact that her religion held but a very slight hold on her mind, that he felt assured that, once his, a small amount of reasoning would be necessary to eradicate 'the errors of her early training' from her mind. Little did he suspect how closely the religion he hated and despised was woven with the fibres of her heart itself. Little did he suppose, when he met her in her morning walks, that she was returning from Mass, or that when he fancied her shopping or making calls, she might have been found on her knees before the altar, or in the hated confessional. Still less did he suspect that she herself had sanctioned the document that the old priest, her nearest relative, insisted on Sir Morcar signing before he would permit his marriage with his niece; and certainly less than all did he imagine that the goodness and purity he so deeply loved, and so truly valued, were the fruits of Catholic Sacraments and Catholic teaching.

Like most brides and bridegrooms, Sir Morcar and Lady Neville started for their wedding trip amid the smiles of a great many, the tears of a few, and a perfect shower of satin slippers. They went to Paris, where a fairyland of delight opened itself before the eyes of the bride. But though the honeymoon was passed amid the gaities that the gayest city in the world can offer, it was by no means a season of unalloyed happiness to Lady Neville. The first faint harbinger of the storm that the O'Mearas had foreseen and dreaded already began to appear on the horizon, and though at present it only took the form of 'a cloud no larger than a man's hand,' Margaret trembled before it.

Her husband began by drawing her into arguments, in which much that was sportive mingled with a great deal that was painful. With a liveliness and tact natural to her she contrived to laugh them off; but they left their sting behind. More than once, too, he prevented her from attending the ceremonies that happened to be going on in the churches around them; and although he did so on the pretext of taking her somewhere else, Margaret could not shut her eyes to the fact that a stronger motive than the one he assigned influenced his interference. Still, this interference took as yet so mild a form, that Margaret succeeded in a great measure in stifling the forebodings of her heart by ascribing all to a desire to exercise his new authority—a childish caprice that would pass away as the novelty of his position as a husband wore off.

Wearied at length of continental gaieties, but prouder of his bride than ever, the Baronet turned his face homewards; and after a few days spent in Dublin, the happy pair betook themselves to Sir Morcar's estate in the west of Ireland. There nothing that affection could devise or money purchase was wanting to the young and grateful wife. Neville Court, her new home, was a large old-fashioned gray stone mansion, beautifully situated in the midst of the wild and picturesque scenery of Connaught. Rugged mountains rose around, hemming it in on all sides; an extensive lake spread its waters far as the eye could reach—sometimes smooth as glass; sometimes rippled by the wind, and dashing its little wavelets against the pebbly shore with a soft and gentle murmur; sometimes spreading itself into broad expanses; some-

times dwindling to a silver thread between the distant mountains. Fir-trees crested the hills and frowned on the borders of the lake, while woods of forest-trees and luxuriant undergrowth covered the mountain-sides and nestled in the valleys. Meadows of the brightest green and tracts of bog-land stretched away to the far horizon, while the cabins that clustered together to form the town of Ballycross, picturesque at least from a distance, with their graceful columns of curling smoke, charmingly diversified the landscape.

Very broad were the estates of Sir Morcar Neville, comprising, as they did, within their circumference the whole of the two large parishes of Ballycross and Neville Town, and a considerable portion of two other parishes besides. Unlike most of the estates around, they were well worked and well drained, and the tenantry on the whole were industrious and contented, and devotedly attached to the Neville family, who had owned the estate from generation to generation, as far back as the memory of man could travel. They had good cause, indeed, for their attachment to Sir Morcar; for not only was he a kind landlord and an indulgent master, but for many years the improvement of his tenantry had been one of the main objects of his life. Little use had he for an agent; he employed one certainly, but his duties consisted in nothing more than collecting rents, and gathering information for his master. Even the most inexperienced observer might have seen at once that throughout every nook and corner of his large estate Sir Morcar's eye and hand and will were paramount.

This was all very well. Everything connected with

her new home delighted Lady Neville, especially the harmonious relations existing between her husband and his tenantry. But she soon discovered that even this happiness was not without its shadow ; for though Sir Morcar was kind and conciliatory to all, he was not quite impartial. The bigotry that she saw with fear and trembling developing itself more and more strongly every day with regard to herself, showed itself even with regard to the people ; and notwithstanding all Sir Morcar's vaunted respect for justice and fair play, Margaret saw in less than a week that Catholics and Protestants were not treated alike.

It was no small cause of congratulation to Lady Neville that, with the exception of one brother, none of Sir Morcar's dreadful and dreaded relations lived within fifty miles of them. Of course, however, each member of the family paid the happy pair a state visit, during which all, especially Sir Morcar's sisters, of whom he possessed several, contrived to make themselves as disagreeable as proud ill-natured people possibly could, and then returned home satisfied at having done their best to show their disapprobation of the match. Very opposite, both in character and conduct, was Edward Neville, to whom the Baronet had shortly before presented the rich living of Ballycross, and who resided in a newly-built and elegant rectory about three miles distant from Neville Court. Like Sir Morcar, he formed a striking contrast to the rest of the family, being a kind, amiable, unostentatious young man, devoted to scientific pursuits, though in all others he was slow, indolent, and a very slave to procrastination. Probably Edward Neville regretted, as much as the rest

of the family, that his brother's wife should be of an alien faith. Still, however this may have been, he never dreamed, for an instant, of interfering with her, but welcomed her home with a kindness proportioned to his affection for Sir Morcar, and the natural warmth of his kind large heart.

CHAPTER II.

YEARS passed away, and during their course the world around her might have envied, and probably did envy, Lady Neville her broad lands, her courteous husband, her obsequious tenantry. But they were years of bitter trial, nevertheless; for the storm had burst with a violence far surpassing anything that Margaret had apprehended, and in spite of the smiles of Fortune she was an unhappy woman. Very soon after her arrival at Neville Court, Sir Morcar had given her to understand, in unmistakable terms, that he intended to leave no stone unturned to induce her to embrace his opinions. Faithfully he kept his word; and a series of petty vexations followed that sorely tried her patience. Only too plainly he saw the pain they inflicted on her; but not for that did he show any intention of discontinuing them. On the contrary, with the utmost perseverance he would express a wish that she would join the family prayer that he read night and morning to his assembled household—an apparently small request it almost broke her heart to refuse, but one that he knew very well she could not accede to without violating her conscience. In the same way, he would ask

her to accompany him to church to hear his brother preach—‘just once in a way’—pointing out the beauty of the morning as an inducement; and again, God only knew the struggle it cost her to say no. Finding that these suggestions received no attention, he tried another course, and began to ridicule in bitter and offensive language all that from her childhood she had held most sacred; and although the nearest Catholic church was seven miles from Neville Court, not unfrequently refused her the use of a carriage to drive there.

All this was hard enough to bear, but as time went on the shadows on Lady Neville’s life grew broader and deeper. Vexation grew into annoyance, annoyance into positive persecution, and this culminated at length in a system that produced a hand-to-hand struggle that lasted for many a year. Whether Sir Morcar’s conduct was the result of the interference of his relations, or whether he was actuated by that spirit of bigotry that seems to adopt as its own the motto it is fond of ascribing to a certain society, we are not prepared to say. But out of the bitter came forth sweet, and Sir Morcar’s conduct had one good effect at least, though the very opposite to the one he had in view. It taught his wife the value of the religious privileges she had perhaps somewhat slighted in her youth, and transformed the once gay and rather thoughtless Margaret Delaney into a truly pious woman.

But this struggle for her faith, though the most bitter, was not the only trial Lady Neville was called upon to sustain. Five children were born to her; but one after the other she was called upon to resign them into the hands of their Father in heaven, and only a row of names

and baby ages on the family vault remained of her treasures. The time came when another sorrow loomed in the distance. During the whole eight years of Margaret's married life the visits and letters of Helen O'Meara had been her one consolation and support. Suddenly news arrived that a pulmonary disease, that had threatened Mrs. O'Meara from childhood, was assuming so serious an aspect that very small hopes were entertained of her recovery. It was hard to give, even to God, the one being on earth who had never failed her, never changed to her, never disappointed her; but so resigned had Margaret Neville's heart grown in the crucible of affliction that the words '*Tua voluntas fiat*' came almost simultaneously with the agony of the news.

Still there was one hope left. A consultation of physicians had prescribed change of air, and had recommended the west of Ireland; and here Sir Morcar, who, in spite of his bigotry, really loved his wife and shared in her affection for Helen O'Meara, came to the assistance. Why not fetch the whole family to Ballycross? To plan and to act with Sir Morcar Neville were almost synonymous terms, and matters were soon arranged. The parish doctor had long been past his work; he was easily induced to resign, on the promise of a pension, and the post offered to O'Meara, at a handsome salary, and with the prospect of a better practice than he had enjoyed in Dublin. He accepted it; and Margaret was soon as hopeful and busy as she could be, preparing the prettiest of little homes for her beloved Helen within half a mile of Neville Court.

As this is only the introduction to our tale, we must

not pause to describe how, during the two years that followed, Dr. O'Meara worked his way into the hearts of the people around. Not only a clever practitioner, but a highly-intelligent man, he soon won the Baronet's admiration and confidence in spite of his religion. But if in the new doctor the Baronet gained an agreeable companion, his tenantry, at least the Catholic portion, gained much more. They gained an advocate whom no motives of self-interest could deter from fulfilling what he considered to be his duty, and that was to represent to Sir Morcar the impolicy, as well as injustice, of his partiality for his Protestant tenants. Never before had the question been mooted. In Ballycross, from time immemorial, the Catholics had been treated with contempt. Not a single man professing their religion had occupied any position of importance for miles round. Even the priest, Father M'Grath, lived in the centre of his parish, at about seven miles' distance from them, in a little tumbledown house near his equally tumbledown church. Poor old man, he did what he could; but as his parish extended nearly twenty miles in one direction and nearly fifteen in another, his visits to every part of it were few and far between, and his influence with Sir Morcar, who rarely saw him, was, as might have been anticipated, less than nothing.

Once or twice the doctor attempted to approach the delicate subject of Lady Neville's unhappiness; but on this point Sir Morcar gave him so clearly to understand that he would suffer no dictation, that O'Meara was compelled to desist for fear of losing the influence he had already gained. So resolute was Sir Morcar that, to show the O'Mearas how lightly he treated their interfer-

ence, after their arrival he grew harsher than ever to his wife. During the first year of their residence at Ballycross two or three times alone was Margaret able to hear Mass; only at Easter did she approach the Sacraments, and then only by a pertinacity that cost her weeks of misery before and after.

The change of climate had at first seemed to work wonders in the attenuated frame of Helen O'Meara; but, after a time, the old symptoms returned, and it soon became evident to all that the progress of the malady could be no longer arrested. Gently and peacefully she passed away, surrounded by all she loved best on earth, and none grieved for her more truly than Sir Morcar.

Never before had he witnessed a Catholic deathbed. Whether it was its holy and radiant calmness, or whether it was the few words that Helen O'Meara spoke to him alone, the night before her death, that influenced him, none ever knew. That there was a change every one saw, for the effect of it was visible throughout the whole of his after-life, and, dark as was Margaret's sorrow, deep in its folds was hidden a mysterious and unexpected joy. The dreary conflict was over; it had terminated in the tacit surrender of Sir Morcar, and the years that followed were years of peace.

Nor was this happy change in her husband's conduct Lady Neville's only consolation in her bereavement; she had another source of happiness in Richard O'Meara, Helen's now motherless boy. He was at this time about ten years of age, as rosy, rough, red-headed, a little urchin as you could have picked up at any cabin-door on the Connaught hills; but so sprightly, so amiable, so win-

ning withal, that he had already become a general favourite from one end of Ballycross to the other. The self-imposed care and education of this child proved a delightful distraction to Lady Neville; and after his mother's death, Richard divided his time almost equally between Neville Court and his father's house. As to Sir Morcar, he dearly loved the sprightly boy, and eagerly offered to share with his wife the care of his education. Thus, by the solicitude of his friends, half the trouble attendant on Dr. O'Meara's bereavement was alleviated; while, as soon as his childish grief for his mother's loss had faded, little Richard's life became one of almost unclouded happiness. His mornings he would pass with the Baronet, sometimes hunting or riding, sometimes sitting patiently beside him in the library, reading Latin authors or making extracts from huge folios to assist him in a certain work on 'agricultural reform.' In the afternoons he might generally have been found in Lady Neville's boudoir, reading with her, modelling for her, or chattering to her about his pleasures and troubles; a theme of which the patient listener never seemed to weary.

About two years after Helen's death, Lady Neville once again became a mother, and to the intense delight of both parents the child appeared healthy and likely to thrive. Weeks grew into months and these again into a year, still no symptom of weakness appeared; and when another year was added to the first and the little Maude could trot round the room and prattle to her delighted father, his happiness knew no bounds. As to Richard O'Meara, his self-devotion to the little lady was simply heroic. He would perform nigger dances, run on all-

fours, twist his face into hideous contortions, stand on his head, or do anything else the ruthless little despot demanded of him by the hour together, not even murmuring when the reward bestowed on his performances was the forcible extraction of a handful of his tawny locks.

A man more changed than Sir Morcar Neville it would have been difficult to imagine. 'Deeds, not words,' seemed to be his motto; for he never alluded to the past, but seemed to try to make amends for it by a hundred kind and loving actions. Among others, he suffered his wife to enlarge the small and hitherto inconvenient Catholic schoolhouse at Ballycross. The following year he himself contributed handsomely towards the erection of a small church in the same place, and as an assistant priest was immediately appointed in consequence, Sir Morcar offered a small house in the neighbourhood for a presbytery. Nor was this all; on the day that the church was consecrated, Sir Morcar himself attended the ceremony, and afterwards entertained both the Bishop and the assistant priests at Neville Court with a kindness and hospitality that could not have been surpassed by the most fervent Catholic gentleman in Ireland. Who shall describe Lady Neville's happiness, or how dearly she learned to love the little square stone edifice, notwithstanding its want of architectural symmetry, that seemed to rise before her as the monument of her husband's restored love, or how vividly she pictured her little Maude one day kneeling there between herself and Richard O'Meara?

But that day was never destined to arrive, for when

the little lady was just three years old, the whole tenor of her parents' life was altered. Whether Sir Morcar had grown weary of the seclusion of country life, or whether he conscientiously believed himself to be the fittest man to represent the county of —, it is not given us to know. Certain it is he offered himself as a candidate, and was in due time returned. Then followed a whirl of business and excitement. A handsome house was taken in London, furnished and prepared; and before Lady Neville could recover from the astonishment incidental to such an unexpected chain of events all was ready for their departure.

God only knew how much it cost her to leave the people who, during so many years of kindly and daily intercourse, had grown almost individually dear to her; or what it cost her to relinquish the seclusion of Neville Court for the whirl and turmoil of the English metropolis and the excitement that must inevitably attend Sir Morcar's political career. But although trial and bereavement had made her shrink from the world and its pleasures, they had brought with them a habit of reflection that had taught her to prefer the call of duty to that of inclination. In the same uncomplaining spirit that she had borne the loss of her friend, she now rose to follow her husband, and he never even suspected how much the effort cost her. He had told his tenants that he was only leaving them for a time, but she feared it was for ever. She knew him better than he knew himself. For some time past she had observed a growing spirit of discontent stealing over him—an evident yearning for more excitement than that afforded by his present life, and she

felt assured that the pleasures of London once tasted, he would never again settle down on his estate, but that his name would henceforward swell the melancholy list of absentees.

It was not until the very moment of their departure that she learned that he had committed the charge of his estate, during his absence, to an agent named Colquhoun. Why she should mistrust this man she hardly knew; for she had seen little of him, though she had noticed that of late he had been frequently closeted with Sir Morcar. She learned this morning for the first time that he had been highly recommended to her husband by a certain Lord ——, whose affairs he had managed for years, and was managing still, to that nobleman's perfect satisfaction. Whether it was the character of Lord ——, well known as one of the hardest landlords in Ireland, or the *personnel* of Colquhoun himself, which was certainly far from prepossessing, Lady Neville could not say; but something there certainly was that prejudiced her against him in no common degree, and her heart seemed to die within her when she heard of his appointment. In vain she tried to induce her husband to select and empower another agent instead. 'The deed was done,' he told her smiling; 'besides Colquhoun was a man in a thousand—not to be matched in all Ireland.' And with a heavy sigh Lady Neville yielded the point, and walked to her carriage in tears.

Old and young had gathered in the village to see them depart, and many a prayer and blessing followed them on their way. But saddest, where all were sad, was Richard O'Meara. Poor boy! Never had page of the olden times

more tenderly venerated his ladye, or invested her with a brighter halo of romance or love. As the carriage rolled out of sight, and he realised the fact that he had looked his last for many a day on one he loved so well, he felt as if his heart would break, and, despite his fifteen years, fairly sobbed in his father's arms.

CHAPTER III.

THE parliamentary session had been over some time, the shooting season had just commenced, and autumn browns of various tints began to glow on the trees in the London parks, as the slanting sunbeams streamed richly and redly through their branches. The stream of life that during the summer, like a rapid river, had poured its tide through the thoroughfares of the West-end, now, like that same river dwindled to the dimensions of a brooklet, drawled and crawled along with little noise or notice. London was out of town.

With the ardour that in earlier days had distinguished Sir Morcar in the management of his estate, he had gone heart and soul into politics, and he and his family were among the few who remained behind in the desert of forsaken London. We do not mean to infer that this formed part of his parliamentary career. His brother M.P.s had long since thrown off the cares of business, and were disporting themselves at their ease on moor and mountain; but Sir Morcar had stayed behind the rest to correct the proofs of a work he was bringing out on 'extended fran-

chise'—a stupendous work, at least so his admirers termed it, destined in their opinions to open the eyes of a slumbering world to a host of startling truths. It was, however, just finished; and Sir Morcar, like the rest of the great and little world, prepared to take wing, not, as Lady Neville had 'hoped against hope,' to his estate, but to the country residence of a brother member, whose interest he desired to conciliate.

She was disappointed, for he had half promised to take her home, and she had lain awake, night after night, picturing poor Richard's rapture, and the delight of the tenantry. She represented to her husband how much his presence was required in Ballycross, where, according to a letter from Dr. O'Meara, affairs were anything but satisfactory among the tenantry. Nobody knew this better than Sir Morcar himself, and this was precisely the reason why he resolved not to visit Ireland. His parliamentary career had involved him in expenses he had never contemplated, and must have ended in serious embarrassments had he not found a friend in need in Mr. Colquhoun. In his hands the estate seemed to the astonished Baronet to have become suddenly a mine of gold, though what the process was that extracted the glittering ore Sir Morcar dare not inquire; and the doctor's letters, that whispered uncomfortable truths, were far from welcome. He, however, consoled himself with the resolution of visiting Ballycross before long to see for himself how the system worked, but for the present he was far too busy. In answer to the questions of his wife, Sir Morcar said a great deal about the responsibilities of his position, and the duty of sacrificing his private interest for the good of his country; but pro-

mised her, as he had promised himself, to run over to Ireland, if possible, at Christmas, and set all to rights. So Lady Neville said no more, though many a bitter tear fell in secret as she prepared for her departure to a house of strangers.

Alas for the blindness of mortals! Could she have known it, how vain were Lady Neville's tears! The visit she had dreaded so much was never destined to be paid. The very day before the one fixed for leaving London she became suddenly ill—so ill that the doctor who was called in ordered little Maude to be taken out of the house immediately. The next morning his worst fears were realised: it was fever—fever caught, as it so often is, nobody knew how, nobody knew where; and though for weeks she struggled against the malady, the crisis came at last, and all hope was over.

A short time before her death she became sensible; but, O, the agony of those lucid moments, in which for the first time she realised the worst evil of a mixed marriage! Forbearing as Sir Morcar had been for the last few years, never restraining, or attempting to restrain, her in the exercise of her religion, she knew what he had been, and what his family still were, and shuddered at the thought that her child's faith must be left henceforward in their hands. 'Not so, my child; but in the Hands of the good God,' whispered the gentle voice of the Jesuit father, who was preparing her for death. At her request he wrote a few hurried lines to Dr. O'Meara, imploring him to watch over her child, and if ever her religion should be in danger, to guard it to the utmost of his power. Nor was this letter her only consolation in her hour of need.

Sir Morcar, worn almost to a shadow with grief and watching, promised of his own accord that Maude should be reared a Catholic, and that so solemnly that it seemed an insult to his love and honour to doubt him. But who shall paint the anguish of the one gnawing dread that harassed that deathbed, otherwise so peaceful, or who describe the intensity of that dying injunction to her husband, 'Remember'?

She died, and Sir Morcar carried her loved remains across the islands, and buried her among the people she had loved so well. Then he sent for her old Catholic nurse from Kerry, and gave his little Maude into her charge; and then started, grief-bowed and aged before his time, to seek distraction anywhere—everywhere. He went abroad, and wandered from one country to another: sometimes dwelling for weeks in Alpine villages; sometimes exploring the antiquities of Rome; sometimes musing by the Rhine; sometimes gazing, as though bewildered, at the moving crowds of Paris or Vienna; but always silent, always alone. At last, one morning, about twelve months after his departure, fearful tidings reached Ballycross: Sir Morcar's horse had stumbled and thrown his rider in the Champs Elysées, and he had been raised from the ground in a dying state. Overwhelmed with grief, Edward Neville started for Paris; but only reached his brother's bedside in time to receive his last farewell.

Never in this world did Edward Neville know what had happened only half an hour before his arrival. Never did he learn how the faithful endurance of a Catholic heart, throughout long years of persecution, had done its silent work, work little suspected or dreamed of even by itself.

But so it was. For the last five years growing every day more and more a Catholic in heart, Sir Morcar had sent for a priest on his deathbed ; and the calm white brow that Edward Neville kissed so passionately in his fraternal love and grief was still wet with the waters of conditional baptism.

As he had brought his Margaret, so they carried him back to Ireland, and buried him on his estate ; not, however, in the magnificent tomb he had raised to her in the new Catholic burial-ground, but in the family vault of the Nevilles. And then they paid off the greater part of the servants, raised a hatchment over the entrance, and in its silence and desolation Neville Court seemed truly the house of the dead.

When the late Baronet's will was opened it was discovered that, although it constituted his 'dearly-beloved daughter Maude' sole heiress of all his possessions, no allusion whatever was made either to her religion or education in case of his death. A family conclave was accordingly held, in which it was unanimously decided that she should be reared a Protestant, and that the care of her education should be confided to a certain Mrs. Carew, an old and valued friend of the family. It was moreover resolved, that, to prevent the possibility of any attempt at perversion on the part of her mother's friends, the young heiress should never be suffered to revisit Ireland until her character and principles should be completely formed.

To this select committee it is needless to say Dr. O'Meara was not admitted ; and though he afterwards called upon Mr. Neville, with whom he was on excellent terms, and did his utmost to get the sentence reversed,

his efforts were in vain. For even the quiet Edward Neville roused himself for the occasion, and expressed his decided opinion that an orphan should be reared in its father's religion; and, unfortunately, the doctor could bring forward no law to confute it. As a last resource, he produced the letter he had received at the time of Lady Neville's death, to prove the wishes of at least one parent; but though Mr. Neville consented to show it to the rest of the family, it was not to be expected that a document dictated by Margaret Neville, and bearing a signature terminating in 'S.J.,' would receive much respect or consideration at their hands,

Two other dissentient voices were raised, but only to be silenced as soon as heard. One was that of the housekeeper at Neville Court—Mrs. Barton, who, from the period of Lady Neville's marriage until her departure from Ireland, had been her own personal attendant. Never had mistress possessed a maid more faithful or more fondly attached; and the blow now aimed so unexpectedly at the dearest interests of the child she had begun to love with an affection almost maternal roused her to indignation, notwithstanding her habitual reverence for those who had inflicted it. But she was soon given to understand by a trio of hard-featured dames that her interference would only result in her dismissal; and as this would have benefited Maude as little as herself, she was silent. The other voice was more obstreperous, being that of the old nurse, Bridget Malone, who steadfastly refused to be silenced. Poor old body! within twenty-four hours afterwards she was back in her Kerry cabin, breaking her loving old heart, and besieging Heaven with prayers that

her 'darlint might die rather than live to hate her mother's faith.'

Immediately after Bridget's dismissal, Maude, now four years of age, was taken by her uncle Edward to London, and placed in the hands of Mrs. Carew, and her father's tenants saw her no more. The well-to-do farmers and farmers' wives cared comparatively little for their baby-mistress; but in the wayside hovels great was the weeping and wailing and wringing of hands when the news was heard. Sunday after Sunday the Catholics had seen and blessed her, as she sat by Bridget in her mother's old seat, and closely had the child twined herself round their simple sensitive hearts. As to Richard and his father, they were inconsolable. Rarely had a day passed since the child's return to Ireland that she had not paid them a morning visit, poking her chubby little face in at the surgery-door, and, if neither of them were to be seen, scampering all over the house till she found them. So deeply did the old doctor take his loss to heart that he never seemed to recover from it, but walked to and fro with bowed head and drooping form, brooding sorrowfully over the dying injunction it had not been given him to fulfil.

Nor was this his only source of sorrow; he had another in the misery of the people around him. By free use of the glib and oily tongue that had won the confidence of Sir Morcar, Mr. Colquhoun had easily induced the trustees of the estate to retain his services. These said trustees had been selected by Sir Morcar from among the members of his own family, and were, each and all, men of the true Neville type; that is to say, they were hard-

hearted cool-headed men of business. They examined Sir Morcar's books, easily estimated the annual value of the land, and as long as Colquhoun paid that into the account of the estate cared for nothing else. Not so Mr. Colquhoun, who cared very much for making a handsome profit for himself, and who easily transferred the increase of returns that had so charmed Sir Morcar, and a great deal more beside, to his own private account. This was not a difficult matter ; for, of the two who might have opposed him, Mr. Neville was too indolent and Dr. O'Meara too infirm to cause him much uneasiness. Sheltered by the approval of the trustees, and armed with his power of attorney, Colquhoun defied the world, and worked his will with impunity. Before long a woful change had taken place ; several of the old tenants had been driven off their farms, the prosperous had become poor, the poor utterly destitute. Dr. O'Meara did what he could : sometimes by letters to the trustees, who, however, always referred him to Mr. Colquhoun ; sometimes by gifts of money and food ; sometimes by representation to the agent himself. The latter alternative occasionally brought redress ; for Colquhoun, who dreaded lest the doctor might one day light upon some ugly transaction, and bring it to the notice of the trustees (who, little as they cared for his hard measures, would have punished his dishonesty), made it a point to satisfy the old man, when he could do so at small expense to himself. But much as the doctor bemoaned the hardness of the agent's measures, he never for an instant suspected his probity. Too upright and simple-hearted himself to imagine fraud or duplicity in others, he took Colquhoun at his own estimate, and counted him a

man too much engrossed in the interests of his employers to be nice about the ways and means of serving them. As far as his gentle nature could he detested the man ; but, to a certain extent, almost respected his character for what he considered his disinterested and indefatigable zeal in his business. But his one hope was to see Colquhoun replaced by a milder agent, his one prayer for better days—days he never lived to see, though he watched and waited patiently for fifteen long weary years.

CHAPTER IV.

AND where was Richard O'Meara while these same fifteen years were passing with rapid wing over the round world, flecking it in their course, and the lives of the little men upon it, with sunshine and shadow, gladness and sorrow—where was he ? Sometimes in one place, sometimes another, changing, under their influence, from a boy into a youth, and from a youth into a man. Not often in the dear 'ould counthry,' or with the father he loved so well ; for soon after Sir Morcar's death Dr. O'Meara sent his son abroad, and from that time forward, by the dispensation of Providence, he and Richard were seldom together.

The first two or three years the boy spent in foreign colleges, whence the reports transmitted home from time to time by his superiors had been more than sufficient to gratify his father's pride. As soon as his education was completed, Dr. O'Meara, who intended him for his own profession, sent him to London, where he remained some

years as a medical student. He passed one examination after another with the greatest credit, qualified, and for some time practised in Dublin. But for many a long day one gnawing doubt had harassed the young man's soul ; and at last he wrote to his father. Never did son receive a warmer heartier response ; and within a month afterwards Richard was at Douay. For two brief happy years the thought that his boy was there, formed the very sunshine of the old man's life. At last, one morning, a letter reached him bearing the words, ' No vocation.' Only to God did the old man tell his disappointment, not even to Richard did he even whisper it.

Disappointed in his desires of entering the priesthood, Richard O'Meara returned to his old profession. After some years spent as before in private practice, he obtained the post of surgeon in the navy, and for three years wandered from one country to another, in the Channel fleet. At first he had been stationed off the Irish coast, and had found frequent opportunities of visiting his father ; but latterly his lot had been cast in the Mediterranean, and thus years passed without a visit home. Suddenly the Thunderer was recalled, and put out of commission ; and on the wings of the wind O'Meara flew home, while awaiting a new appointment.

But the very first glance at the decrepit form that hobbled down to the gate to meet him decided a long wavering balance, and that very night saw Richard's resignation posted to the Admiralty. For the first time in his life the old doctor not only refrained from opposing, but even seemed to sanction a proceeding that appeared prejudicial to his son's welfare. Nor was this the only in-

stance in which he seemed to have grown unmindful of it. A few days later a letter arrived from a London physician, making young O'Meara an offer of partnership; but although a grateful smile at first overspread the father's face, the instant after it passed away, and a somewhat troubled look succeeded it. Richard observed it, and naturally attributed it to the old man's unwillingness to part with him again, in his fast-increasing helplessness. But a far higher influence was at work in Dr. O'Meara's heart. In the many long and quiet hours that he had passed alone since his infirmities had confined him to the house, two subjects of thought had wearied and troubled him day after day, and those had been his two unfulfilled promises. Over and over again Maude Neville in her Protestantism, and Ballycross in its misery, seemed to rise before him and tacitly upbraid him. Yet what could he have done to save them, he asked, that he had not tried to do? 'Nothing,' said his conscience, as often as he asked the question. But just as often the tormenting thought returned. At last, one day, the idea stole into his mind, that as in three years Maude would be of age, great changes must then take place, and he had begun to reflect how much he then might have been able to effect, had the stout heart and strong will of other days been his portion still. But while he thought, another idea came in the wake of the first, and from that moment the old man had prayed that the stout heart and strong will of his son might even yet be permitted to redeem his father's promise. Full well he comprehended what a sacrifice of Richard's future hopes and prospects this would involve; but Dr. O'Meara stood where all must one day stand—on the

threshold of eternity, and estimated sacrifices, as all will then estimate them, at their true value.

Still it was not an easy position for an affectionate heart, and even while the physician's letter lay before him, the poor old doctor's was sadly divided. He, however, resolved to lay the matter before his son, and to let it speak for itself; determining simply to point out the good he might effect, yet in no way to try and persuade him that he was the man to effect it, but to leave the issue to God. He accordingly collected his remaining energies, and very calmly and gently pointed out the exact condition of the people round them. Occasional details Richard had heard before, but amid the excitement of his ever-changing career, they had made but a slight impression. Except a general idea that the Neville estate had fallen into the hands of a severe agent, Richard O'Meara had been almost in the dark concerning the home of his childhood from the day he had quitted it for college until now. With a truthful hand the old doctor painted the hardships of the tenantry; and as tale after tale, each sadder than the last, fell upon his ears, Richard's eye flashed with indignant anger, even while his lips quivered with pity and emotion. Of course Dr. O'Meara, even while he bemoaned the agent's harshness with the tenderness and charity natural to him, strove to palliate it on the ground of his zeal. But Richard knew the world too well to believe that any man would incur the deadly hatred of a whole population, as Colquhoun had incurred that of the Neville tenantry, and run, as he did, daily risk of their vengeance, for his master's profit only; though lest he should excite his father, he kept his suspicions to him-

self, and only promised him to settle at Neville Town, and do all he could for the people. The old man pressed his hand, and Richard, walking quietly to his own room, sat down, and without a sigh, declined the offer that might one day have placed him on an eminence equal to that of any M.D. in the world.

Three months later, Dr. O'Meara passed away, 'fortified with the Sacraments of the Church,' and blessing his son with the blessing of the old patriarch. Richard buried him beside his mother in the little graveyard across the hills, and then prepared for his long and dreary conflict with avarice, injustice, and fraud. Mr. Colquhoun, who instinctively feared, and consequently hated, him, waited day after day to see him depart, little dreaming that a young man of such parts and promise could contemplate settling in so remote and unpromising a region as Ballycross. But day after day passed away, and grew into weeks, and still the doctor gave no signs of departure. Sick of suspense, Mr. Colquhoun at length resolved to bring the question to a point, and accordingly called and politely inquired whether Dr. O'Meara 'would like to make arrangements about the remaining term of the lease, as he knew a party,' &c. To his dismay he learned that Dr. O'Meara had no such wish, as he intended to occupy the premises himself. To make the best of a bad bargain, Colquhoun next tried to propitiate his new neighbour by every means in his power, from the promise of patients, down to offers of game, but found all his favours coldly but civilly declined. Not coat of mail, nor armour of 'triple brass,' could have more effectually repelled him, than did O'Meara's cool contempt, and Colquhoun at

length withdrew in sullen silence, to brood over a very unpleasant sensation in his conscience that a storm might any day break over his devoted head.

In the mean time Richard renewed his old acquaintance with the people, and quickly recovered the place he had held in their affections as a boy. He was now a tall broad-shouldered man of thirty, with a head still as red and rough, and features every bit as irregular, as in his boyish days. Still, though far from handsome, there was so much energy always flashing in his bright gray eyes, and so much fun always playing around his wide mouth and brilliant white teeth, that his face possessed a charm often wanting to many a clear-cut Grecian profile. His figure too had developed into proportions of unusual strength and symmetry. His manners were those of a man accustomed to good society; while the 'flavour of a brogue' that spiced his accent imparted a richness and raciness to his remarks that nothing else in the world could have given them. A sound education had cultivated a mind naturally studious and intelligent; while his powers of thought and observation had been still further improved by travel, and a considerable amount of intercourse with the world. Like both his parents, he was ardently pious; but his piety was bright and joyous, and savoured nothing of the austerity that had slightly tinctured his father's. As an Irishman, he was of course somewhat hasty and hot-tempered, but the storm never lasted long; for in the depths of that broad bosom he carried one of the tenderest hearts and most forgiving dispositions ever found in man.

Such was the man who, deliberately abandoning all

that men generally seek in wealth and position, set himself to the task of redressing, as far as lay in his power, the wrongs of a people having no other claim upon him than the common claims of Christian charity. As, in his professional character, he passed from house to house among the Neville tenantry, from their own lips he learned the story of their hardships; but although each day beheld him more and more convinced of Colquhoun's dishonesty, months passed by, and he sought in vain for any legal proof of it. And yet to act without would be both dangerous and useless: dangerous with regard to Colquhoun, who would instantly charge him with libel; useless with the trustees, who would only treat his suspicions as they had treated his father's complaints. Deep were his perplexities, and long were the consultations that he and the parish priest held on the subject, but both agreed that the time for action had not yet come, and that patience and vigilance were as yet the only remedies that could be applied to the evil.

Thus passed three years, when suddenly a whisper was heard throughout the length and breadth of her broad estates that Miss Neville was coming to Ireland, and would be at the Glebe House, her uncle Edward's residence, the first week in April. The earliest sound of the joyful tidings reached Richard (or, as we may now call him, Dr. O'Meara) as he and Father Donovan were sitting at dinner one evening in early March. The doctor read the letter aloud; and so exactly did it bear on the subject they had been discussing that, for a few moments, he and his guest sat and looked at each other in mute surprise.

'What is to be done now?' asked the priest at length.

‘What we have already decided, I should say,’ replied O’Meara; ‘only we must act now instead of six months hence. It seems to me that nothing now remains to be done but for me to proceed to Dublin at once, consult the attorney you mention, and, if he considers this evidence sufficient, leave everything to him. If not, our only remaining chance will be to convince Miss Neville of Colquhoun’s moral obliquity, although how to do this is the question. Unfortunately he has Mr. Neville on his side, for he has blinded him as he blinded first Sir Morcar, and afterwards the trustees. May God in His mercy grant that he may not blind the niece also, though, unless He works almost a miracle to prevent it, I cannot see what else we are to expect! How hard it is to feel that we have right and justice on our side, to say nothing of the happiness of hundreds of tenants depending on what we may be able to effect, and yet to feel ourselves so powerless! For what can we do? You are intimate with Mr. Neville to a certain degree, so am I; but neither of us to an extent that would justify us, in his eyes, in interfering in Miss Neville’s affairs. However, I will do what I can in Dublin; you must pray for me.’

‘I will say Mass for you every day. Take courage; God Himself has laid this responsibility upon you, for it has been none of your own seeking; and you may be very sure He will help you. Wickedness has never prevailed yet against those who have put their trust in Providence, and never will; so take heart, and may God bless you!’

The doctor smiled. ‘There is another question and a much brighter one, to be considered yet,’ he added, after a pause; ‘and I do not intend that even Mr. Colquhoun

shall put that out of my head. I mean how we are to receive our young heiress. I expect that even in this matter, unless we undertake it, nothing will be done; for between the few who could do a great deal, but who *will* do nothing, and the many who would do a great deal, but *can* do nothing, her reception will, I fear, be a very miserable one. I must see what I can arrange when in Dublin.'

'But the funds, my dear boy?'

'Don't trouble yourself about that, my dear Father Donovan. I have a good round sum laid by in a quiet corner, and her mother's child would be welcome to it if it were twenty times as much. It shall not be my fault if she is not received like a princess. So you see I have a world of business to do, for I must be back for St. Patrick's-eve, or Mr. Neville will never forgive me. I had better start to-morrow. Come and dine with me again this day week, and you shall hear the result of my journey.'

The priest took his leave, and for nearly an hour after his departure O'Meara sat before the fire, lost in a reverie. When at length he rose from his seat and walked towards his surgery there was a look of stern resolve upon his countenance, such as one seldom saw there. That it had reference to Mr. Colquhoun was evident from a few whispered words that escaped his lips at the same time. Could the agent, as he sat at that moment in his dingy office in Dublin examining, like a bloated spider, the various meshes of his ever-extending web,—could he have seen that glance and heard those words, he could not have answered more opportunely than he did.

'O, O! So Miss Neville goes to uncle Edward the

first week in April, does she, and stops a week at Dublin on the way? Thank you, Miss Neville—the very one thing I wanted; only do that, and my fortune's made. I defy the whole world to work Ned Colquhoun out where he has once worked himself in!

CHAPTER V.

SUCH of my readers as have never crossed the Irish Channel have missed one fine sight at least, and that is the sight of a real genuine Irish turf-fire. It would really pay a Londoner to travel all the way from his grand city to Connaught just to look at one. What a heat it sheds from its glowing breast, what a light from its flaming crest, what a shower of ashes falls, like molten gold, into the pit below, to be there transformed to flakes and feathers of silver! How it laughs and sparkles and hisses and crackles, as though calling all the world together to rejoice in its warmth, the merriest fire alive!

It was just such a fire as this that was burning one cold evening in March in the drawing-room of the Glebe House, Ballycross; and to judge by the way in which it twinkled on the mirrors, and among the old china in the cabinets, putting the very wax-lights to shame, it highly approved of its quarters. No wonder; for that drawing-room was certainly a very comfortable apartment, with its rich mossy carpet and its heavy silk curtains, so carefully wadded that not the tiniest whiff of a blast could creep through. And very elegant withal, with its tables loaded with

triumphs of art and objects of *virtù*, its ormolu and marqueterie, its Indian rarities and Chinese eccentricities, its chairs and couches that met you at every turn, each more comical and quaint than the last, but all the softest and most luxurious when you came to sit down upon them that ever the genius of upholsterer devised. What fine old paintings adorned the walls, and what an amount of fancy work, exotics, books, and ornaments of every kind were heaped together to put their fairylike finishing touch to the whole!

Truly nothing was wanting in the Glebe House drawing-room that could contribute to either comfort or convenience; and the four persons assembled therein evidently knew how to appreciate the luxury that surrounded them. Mr. Neville himself looked the very personification of ease, as, reclining almost at full length in a newly-invented reading-chair, with his lamp on a little table beside him, he turned over a parcel of new scientific books just received from London. Close by the fire, in the very cosiest corner of the room, in a luxurious sewing-chair, sat Miss Barbara Neville, a lady whose dignity of mien was only surpassed by her severity of countenance and sharpness of voice. She was knitting with exemplary diligence, only occasionally pausing to scold her nephew, Harry, for looking up from his books, or to assure her niece, on the authority of Dr. Watts, that 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.'

And yet, although her aunt's exhortation might seem to imply a fact to the contrary, Miss Fanny Neville was ordinarily a very busy little body. Every bazaar that had been held in the neighbourhood, in any orthodox cause

whatsoever, since she could hold a needle, the poor of the parish, and many of her own simple dresses could have amply attested the diligence of those little white fingers. But to-night she neither worked at lace nor embroidery, children's frocks nor old women's petticoats, but she and her little white poodle nestled instead in the cushions of a large armchair that she had drawn quite close to her father's elbow. And in spite of aunt Barbara's strictures, they nestled there still, the prettiest of all the pretty things in the room, she taking long loving looks at her father as he puckered his forehead over small print and intricate diagrams, and Looloo glancing shyly at aunt Barbara from under his woolly locks. Well, the little dog might have searched a long time before he had found a more proper or genteel-looking person to scrutinise than Miss Neville, as she sat at her nephew's fireside in the seat of his poor gentle dead wife, with her feet nestling in the white silky fringes of the winter hearthrug, superintending his reverence's household, managing his children, and arranging his parish matters at one and the same time with a versatility of genius worthy of a Cæsar.

'Papa, I think it is almost time for you to start for the station, if Maude's train arrives at eight,' said Fanny, gently laying her hand on her father's arm.

'What, my dear? what is it?' he asked, starting. Then recovering himself and remembering where he was, who was speaking, and what was said, he continued, 'No, not yet, my dear child; it is not more than half an hour's drive to the station, and it is hardly a quarter-past seven yet;' and after stroking her hair fondly, and patting Looloo, he returned to his books.

Fanny sighed impatiently.

‘I never knew an evening so long as this seems to be in my life. I suppose it is because I am so anxious to see Maude. I wonder what she will be like!’

‘I wonder what my father would have said, if I had lolled about like that when I was a girl of seventeen,’ said a sharp voice from the other side of the fireplace.

Fanny moved slightly; but a sweet bright smile stole over the top of the new book and assured the little maiden that one father at least was content with his daughter, however dissatisfied another parent might have found reason to be with his, so many years ago, when aunt Barbara was seventeen.

The evening wore on. Mr. Neville occasionally turned a leaf, Miss Barbara knitted away in awful silence, while Harry plodded on at the Latin book he had been constrained to bring close to his aunt’s elbow, that she might watch his movements with one eye, while she counted her stitches with the other. But alas, poor Harry! human nature would be human nature still, in spite of even aunt Barbara’s precautions; great was her indignation at discovering her nephew at one time actually counting his marbles, and at another stealing shy glances at a well-thumbed volume about a certain *Red Tomahawk* that was lying back uppermost, as though asking to be read. How awful Miss Barbara looked at each discovery! and how poor Harry withered beneath her glance down to the very toes of his boots.

At last Fanny, who was beginning to grow very anxious, ventured to ask her father at what time he had ordered the carriage. This question led to the discovery

that he had forgotten to order it all, and when, on consulting his watch, he found that in ten minutes more the train would be due, the poor old gentleman looked ruefully discomposed. His children, as usual, did what they could to mend matters. Harry rushed off to the stables, Fanny for his hat, coat, and wrapper, and, thanks to their united efforts, Mr. Neville started only twenty minutes after the arrival of the train.

Harry accompanied his father, and another dismal hour of silence ensued. To pass the time, Fanny took up book after book; but never had authors seemed so dry and stupid before, and she very soon returned to her original occupation of stroking Looloo's ears. At last wheels were heard approaching the house, and Fanny, unceremoniously throwing down her woolly pet, flew behind the curtains and peeped out into the night.

'A lady should always be distinguishable by her dignity and repose of manner, and that is what Fanny Neville will never be,' said aunt Barbara, evidently addressing herself to Looloo, as there was nobody else to listen.

'She has come, Fanny, she has come!' cried Harry, throwing open the drawing-room door with such glee that the ornaments on a table near it jingled; 'and she's such a jolly girl!' he added confidentially; 'you will like her so!'

'Well, I am sure, sir,' began aunt Barbara; but further speech was prevented by Mr. Neville's entrance with his niece upon his arm.

'Your aunt Barbara, Maude, my dear,' said Mr. Neville, somewhat ceremoniously.

Maude looked up in no small astonishment at the gaunt form before her, but received very courteously the tips of the two fingers with which Miss Barbara presented her, and the very icy kiss that that lady imprinted on her forehead. This frigid ceremony being performed, Fanny sprang forward to take her turn, and the next moment the cousins were locked in each other's arms. After a host of questions from Harry about her journey, and another truly parental kiss from her uncle, whose mild eyes seemed to overflow with happiness at having her with him, Maude was seized upon by Fanny and hurried away, *nolens volens*, to the pretty room that had been prepared for her. There another glorious peat-fire was burning, and as soon as Maude was divested of her travelling dress and her maid, Mrs. Watson, dismissed to make friends with the housekeeper and astonish her with her stories of London life, the cousins sat down before the merry blaze and talked away quite as merrily, awaiting the summons to tea. While the two happy girls revel in their unrestrained chatter, we will, with the reader's kind permission, briefly—lest we should weary him or her with another retrospection—very briefly sketch our heroine's somewhat uneventful career since we saw her snatched from Biddy's faithful arms to be consigned to the care of Mrs. Carew.

In the selection of an instructress for their orphan charge, the Neville family had acted with uncharacteristic wisdom; for, except in the matter of religion, in which she only acted according to her lights, Mrs. Carew was all that could be desired. During the whole of the fourteen years that Maude had remained under her charge,

sometimes in London, sometimes in Germany, sometimes in France, Mrs. Carew had watched over her with a tenderness truly maternal, while Maude's affection for her adopted mother knew no bounds. Mrs. Carew was a gentlewoman by birth, possessing high talents and attainments and still higher principles, and she had spared no pains either with the moral or mental culture of her pupil. At eighteen Maude Neville was a highly-accomplished girl, as amiable as she was clever, and as simple-hearted as she was bright. Somewhat inclined to romance perhaps, but endowed with common sense more than sufficient to keep her romantic tendencies in check.

At the period that the Nevilles had intrusted their little relative to Mrs. Carew that lady was, and had been for years, extremely 'Low Church' in her opinions, in fact, an 'ultra-Evangelical.' As may be supposed, she was deeply shocked at the impression that Biddy's religious training had already made on the pliant mind of her young charge, and immediately set to work to efface it with a pertinacity and zeal worthy of a better cause. So strenuously did she labour, and with such good effect, that as Maude grew to womanhood her earliest associations seemed to be in connection with Bible-classes, Sunday-schools, and district-visiting; the very remembrance of Biddy and the O'Mearas had faded from her mind.

But as time went on, a change came over Mrs. Carew's opinions. The dreaded and rarely-seen 'Tractarianism' of her youth gradually developed itself into the more modern and more widely-spread form of Ritualism; and by a concatenation of events that it is not necessary to narrate here, Mrs. Carew, after passing through the usual

gradations, ended by becoming an 'ultra-Ritualist.' As a matter of course, Maude became an ultra-Ritualist too; and the young lady, who not long before had defended 'evening communion' and read the *Days of Laud* aloud at Dorcas-meetings, now talked of High celebration and Low celebration, went to confession, and embroidered stoles, slippers, and sermon-cases for a delicate and fashionable young 'priest' by the dozen.

But whatever change or changes their religious opinions underwent during the fourteen happy years that Mrs. Carew and Maude spent together, not a shadow of variation ever disturbed the sweet bond of harmony that existed between them. And yet one thought, and that a very bitter one, for years marred the happiness of both, and that was the consciousness that an hour of parting must sooner or later come; and on the very day that Maude was eighteen the blow fell. It came in the form of a letter from her uncle Edward, upon whom, as her father's executor, devolved the office of guardian to herself. In answer to Maude's earnest solicitations he had already suffered her to remain with Mrs. Carew twelve months longer than the original agreement; 'but the time,' he said, 'had now expired;' and in the name of all the Nevilles he was peremptory. 'Maude must go into society.' Long as she had expected it, she received this letter much as she would have received the warrant for her execution; for Maude loved simplicity; and the very idea of the parade and ostentation of fashionable life was distasteful to her.

A few days later a second letter arrived—this time from one of her aunts—and informed the young girl that

‘the family’ considered it expedient that she should spend the next two years among her relatives in England, passing the two London seasons at the town-residence of her two most influential aunts. At the end of that time she was to return to Ireland, and pass the months that would intervene before her coming of age with the family of her uncle Edward. This was the one sunny spot in the programme; for let her school her heart as she might, she could not learn even to like, far less to love, one single other member of her father’s family. But uncle Edward and his charming little wife (for he had married shortly before Sir Morcar’s death) were lustrous exceptions to this general indifference. They had passed several summers abroad with Mrs. Carew and her charge, and had thoroughly won the hearts of both. On one of these occasions their little daughter Fanny had accompanied them, and a sisterly affection had sprung up between the children, so strong and enduring that neither the separation of many succeeding years, nor the distraction of new scenes, nor the charms of new faces, had had power to break or even diminish it.

It is by no means our intention to give the details of the two years passed by Maude Neville in the fashionable world. Suffice it to say that she lived in a continuous whirl of change and excitement, in which a certain amount of amusement and interest alternated with a great deal more of ‘vanity and vexation of spirit.’ Her old aunts smiled grimly behind their fans, and many a heart quivered with jealousy at the sensation made by the young heiress, whose beauty, wealth, and talents formed the topics of conversation in half the circles of Mayfair

for two successive seasons. It was a brilliant career ; but the very innocence of her heart preserved her amid the dangers that surged around her ; for though under the specious forms of dress, luxury, and admiration, the world, the flesh, and the devil contended for their victim, she seemed to bear a charmed life, and every shaft they aimed fell harmless at her feet. Whence came this grace ? Was it in answer to a mother's prayer breathed long ago, or to hundreds of others that for years had risen for her night and morning among her native hills ?

The more the young girl saw of her relatives the less she loved them, and gratitude for the attentions they and their friends lavished upon her was the only tie that bound her to them. She felt constrained and miserable ; for in no one instance were their ways her ways. Her Ritualism she kept a profound secret, knowing that the discovery of it would expose Mrs. Carew rather than herself to a storm of reproaches, and she patiently ' sat under ' men, Sunday after Sunday, who, although members of her own Church, taught the exact opposite (and that on doctrines of vital importance) to all she had learned to believe. How this could happen in the ' one Church ' Maude was puzzled to know, and accordingly wrote to ' Father North ' on the subject. The answer she received had evidently cost the rev. gentleman a power of paper and trouble, seeing that he proved entirely to his own satisfaction, and in accordance with his own ideas of logic, that one and one do not make two, but one. But as the answer only puzzled Maude more than ever, she laid it reverently aside, as something to be admired rather than understood, and solved the question on trust. Meanwhile the poor child

sighed for the long-desired moment of her emancipation ; and although, for the sake of her entertainers, she never manifested the weariness she felt, often when she smiled most brightly her heart was heaviest.

At last the day arrived, and that even a fortnight earlier than Maude had anticipated. Her departure had been fixed for the beginning of April ; but about the middle of March her aunt's husband, who was to have taken her to Ireland, was suddenly seized with gout. As his seizures were sometimes of long duration, Maude saw no alternative but to make up her mind to remain in London at least the half of another season, when suddenly an old friend of her father's one morning unexpectedly presented himself. He informed her that he was obliged to proceed to Galway the very next day, and offered to take charge of her if she could get ready upon so short a notice. That very afternoon a letter was despatched to Ballycross, and the next morning Maude and her maid met the old gentleman at Euston-square, the latter by no means as delighted as her mistress at exchanging the charms of London life for the retirement and monotony of the country.

After a pleasant journey our travellers arrived at ———, a quiet little station on the single line of rail that traverses, or at that time traversed, Connaught ; and where they were forced to take up their quarters in a miserable little waiting-room, crowded with packages and parcels of all shapes and sizes, for very nearly an hour, while awaiting the arrival of uncle Edward. He arrived at last ; and with many exclamations of delight at meeting his niece, and many expressions of gratitude to the old gentleman for

his care of her, relieved the latter of his charge. The invitation to the Glebe House, with which the thanks were accompanied, was declined on the plea of urgent business; and five minutes later Maude and her uncle were on their way over a road, all hills and valleys, to Ballycross.

It was not until the porter was heaving the last box on the cart that had been sent for the luggage that he caught sight of the name on the luggage-label. He was an old servant of Sir Morcar, and immediately signified his delight by tossing his cap into the air—an action which, although perfectly unintelligible to them, was immediately imitated by a posse of gossoons outside, who had been watching the carriage start, and who accompanied it by a yell that could not have failed to have startled the horses had they been within earshot, which fortunately they were not.

But Jerry, clever as he thought himself, was not the first to make that same discovery. A passenger had arrived in the same train as the travellers, and the instant he caught sight of them began to make himself exceedingly officious in rendering them a very great deal of unnecessary assistance, part of which had consisted in abusing the station-master and his assistant in the most outrageous manner. To ingratiate himself still more, he had insisted on joining in the search for a small box mislaid for the moment; and had rewarded himself for his trouble, by taking a peep at the lid—the one end of all his attentions. It was only a momentary glance, but it was more than sufficient; and as Mr. Colquhoun walked to his lodgings that night he blessed his stars over and over again, and counted himself a lucky man. He should get the start in her good

graces at any rate, for he had that very morning met Dr. O'Meara in Dublin. How little Maude suspected, as she drove along in the silence and darkness of the mountain landscape, the very different reception that was being so enthusiastically planned for her, at that same moment, by a being of whose very existence she was ignorant!

Whatever degree of excellence Harry Neville had intended to imply when he had dubbed his newly-arrived cousin 'a jolly girl' Fanny was fully prepared to admit it, for she thought as Maude sat beside her she had never seen any one half so charming before. And yet she would have been puzzled to say whether that charm lurked most in face, figure, or style. Perhaps in all three, perhaps in neither; but rather in a certain natural grace that old Erin loves to lavish on her daughters here and there in every rank of life, and which she had bestowed with no sparing hand on Maude Neville. As may well be imagined, the cousins had plenty to tell and talk about; Fanny had so many questions to ask, and Maude so many messages to give, that neither of them knew where to begin. For a long time the conversation was a very joyous one, until one of Maude's questions touched a mournful key, and they began to talk lovingly and sadly of poor Mrs. Neville's death, that had happened about a year before, and of how patiently and piously her husband had borne his loss. But the subject was still so trying to Fanny that Maude wished to change it; and therefore inquired what relation to them that very stiff-looking individual in the drawing-room might be, and how she came to be located at the Glebe House. Then Fanny

told her how the post had one morning brought a letter for her father from a maiden aunt, Miss Barbara Neville, informing him that the said Miss Neville, finding her long experience unappreciated in a sister's family in which she had resided twelve months, and knowing that her dear niece's children had been deprived of a mother's care, had decided on offering her services to her bereaved nephew. Fanny furthermore informed her cousin that, without giving the said nephew time to reply, Miss Neville had arrived that same evening, bag and baggage, and had remained ever since. Poor Fanny intended her recital to be a pathetic one, but there was something in the progressive encroachments of aunt Barbara that struck Maude in so comical a light that she laughed till she fairly cried. Of course the contagion spread to Fanny, and the two girls so far forgot the flight of time in their chatter that it was not till Harry tapped at the door to inquire if cousin Maude had gone to bed that they remembered that they were expected down-stairs. Startled into a sense of propriety the two chatterboxes sprang from their seats; Maude hastily put a few finishing touches to her toilette, and then they joined Harry, who was waiting outside in the passage to conduct them to tea. As she swept down the wide staircase, her arm lovingly entwined round her pretty little cousin, whose slight form and delicate features formed a striking contrast to her own commanding figure and sparkling beauty, a feeling of deep contentment stole over Maude Neville's heart, for she felt that she had really found a home in her uncle's house, let aunt Barbara be what she might. Still a sense of disappointment passed over her heart as she beheld the gaunt

form of that lady in the chair once occupied by her sweet little aunt; but a kind glance from her uncle reassured her, and although Miss Barbara did a great deal to make every one uncomfortable by lecturing Harry and scolding the servants, the evening passed pleasantly. For, inspired either by Maude's vivacity, or by a kindly desire to make her feel at home, Mr. Neville for the first time since his aunt's arrival came out of his shell, and laughed and talked to Maude and his daughter, one on each side, just like old times. As for Harry, he became so engrossed in the conversation that his aunt's strictures were suffered to pass unheeded, which so offended that lady that after tea she retired in high dudgeon to her own room. The rest of the little party, thus left in unrestrained enjoyment of each other's society, passed a delightful evening. They adjourned to the drawing-room, where Maude played with such exquisite taste and skill that her uncle, instead of intrenching himself in his books, stood at the piano half the evening. Fanny looked on and listened from her corner beside Looloo radiant with delight, while Harry sat revelling to his heart's content in the *Red Tomahawk*. The very domestics caught the contagion, and peals of laughter issued that night from the servants' hall such as had not been heard since the Angel of Death had hovered over the Glebe House, and borne away the light of the house in his embrace.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS BARBARA NEVILLE was a terrible person. She had been only twelve months in Ballycross, yet already she reigned supreme. Mr. Neville had fled at the approach of the enemy, and intrenched himself in his library; Fanny had meekly bent her neck to the yoke; and though for a time poor Harry had kept up a certain amount of light skirmishing, he had been compelled to yield in the end. In the parish Miss Barbara was all that a strong-minded female could be, blessed with the strongest possible belief in her own power and piety, and the most utter contempt for everybody else's, combined with the greatest possible hatred of 'Romanism,' and directed by the experience she had gained in the various parishes she had helped to mismanage, and contributed to set by the ears.

Barbara Neville loved power. All her life she had longed for a position where she could command, contrive, and execute without interference. Bigoted, hard, and uncompromising in character, she pursued her schemes of reform with a zeal only exceeded by her intolerance, and woe betide the luckless individual who should presume to thwart her, or to hold the smallest opinion of his own. And yet, poor woman, she was not without her better points. Who is? Lucifer himself is said by some never to have committed any sin but pride; and it is highly probable that all Miss Barbara's peculiarities might have been summed up as either ambition or bad temper. But these are uncomfortable items when the object of the

one is to govern another person's household, and the consequence of the other to make everybody in it miserable. It must have been but a poor compensation to aunt Barbara's victims to have known that she possessed a certain amount of generosity, and was not perhaps, *au fond*, bad-hearted.

In her nephew's family aunt Barbara had hitherto seemed to realise the darling wish of her heart. It may seem surprising perhaps to our readers, that an old-established household, such as Mr. Neville's, should have suffered itself so tamely to be changed, and even remodelled, at the will of a comparative stranger. It must, however, be remembered that aunt Barbara had appeared upon the scene at a moment when grief had rendered the whole family passive, and to a certain extent glad of a guiding head. The father had been too bewildered, Fanny too timid, Harry too young, and all too broken-hearted to stem the torrent. So one encroachment had succeeded another, until aunt Barbara's 'reforms' had swept away nearly every time-honoured institution. Each of them had regretted the unloving discipline that had changed the freedom and happiness of home into gloom and restraint; but they had felt that death had had fully as large a share in the change as aunt Barbara; and while they sighed over past happiness, they looked upon the alteration in their home and its comforts almost as a necessary part of their bereavement.

The morning after Maude's arrival aunt Barbara awoke with a very heavy weight upon her heart. She could not have said why; and yet, from the moment that Maude's bright eyes had shone into hers the night before, and that

Maude's silvery laugh had echoed through the drawing-room, she had felt that her reign was over. All night long, through a series of troubled dreams, Miss Barbara had realised, at least in its spirit, the truth of the Shakespearian axiom, 'uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' Still, like many another usurper, she resolved to fight to the last, and rallied her failing heart with the hope of vanquishing the new-comer, as she had vanquished the rest. Armed for this desperate conflict, she descended to breakfast, with a countenance that bore evident marks of her perturbation in its extra sourness and austerity.

The morning meal was very similar to that of the night before. Again Miss Neville presided, and divided her time between the duties of the table, eating her breakfast, frowning at the servants, and lecturing Harry; but again, to the satisfaction of everybody, Mr. Neville came 'out of his shell,' and chatted away, as Fanny afterwards told him, 'just like his dear old self.' For some time the conversation turned upon the friends Maude had left behind. Her uncle wanted to learn all he possibly could respecting certain of his old chums and cronies that Maude had met at her aunt's. Fanny asked sly questions about the fashions, while Harry tried to glean all possible information concerning a certain cousin Ned, just entered at Westminster. As Miss Barbara cared neither for the chums, the fashions, nor cousin Ned, and as she had, moreover, at some period or another, quarrelled with nearly all the other personages mentioned, or with some member of their respective families, she asked no questions at all, but ate her breakfast with an air of sullen indifference to the conversation. It was not until the

topic was exhausted, and Mr. Neville had taken up his newspaper, that she condescended a remark.

‘You seem to have been having a fine time in London for the last two years, Maude. Well, you must make up your mind to something very different here, I can tell you.’

‘You have been among the butterflies, dear, and now you have come to the bees,’ said Fanny, smiling.

‘How do you like the idea of being among bees, cousin Maude?’ asked Harry.

‘Very much, Harry; bees such as you are, all honey, and no sting.’

‘No rule without an exception,’ thought Harry, glancing towards the head of the table.

‘If you could only know,’ continued Maude, ‘how deeply I have been longing to come to you—to uncle Edward, to dear old Neville Court, and to my poor father’s faithful old tenants!’

‘There will be quite a sensation in the parish I expect this morning, cousin Maude, when it gets abroad that you have arrived,’ said Harry.

‘I do not want to make a sensation,’ returned Maude, ‘but I do want to see all the people around love me. I know, from the bottom of my heart, I already love them.’

‘You would not be your mother’s child if you did not,’ thought her uncle, though he seemed absorbed in his paper.

‘When I lived with Mrs. Carew, I used to visit the poor a very great deal,’ continued Maude; ‘but my lot has been cast in such a different sphere since I left her, that I have not seemed to do anything, nor think about

anybody else but myself. My days, and, I am sorry to say, very many of my nights, have been passed in a whirl of vanity; but, thank God, it is all over now, and for the rest of my life I shall be free to live as I like.' And Maude heaved a deep and somewhat characteristic sigh of relief. 'I am afraid I shall find visiting the poor here very different work from what it was in London,' she continued, after a pause; 'but if you will help me, Fanny, I daresay I shall soon get into the way of it.'

Miss Barbara fidgeted.

'Yes, dear; but I myself do not understand very well yet the best way of assisting the people around us. It is a very difficult art, Maude, it seems to me, that of doing real good to the poor.'

'I should rather think it is,' broke in Miss Barbara; 'and that is just the reason that I have been of so much use in the parish, where before my arrival things seem to have been always at sixes and sevens. Everything ought to be built on a proper foundation; and if you want to manage parish work well, Maude, you cannot do better than place yourself under my guidance. Though I say it myself, you may depend upon it there is no one who understands the subject more thoroughly. Your uncle, I think, will bear testimony to this fact.'

She looked appealingly at her nephew as she spoke, but he only puckered his forehead more deeply over his papers.

'I am sure, aunt, I shall be very grateful for any hints you may give me in—'

'Hints! I never deal in hints!' cried aunt Barbara. 'I shall give you something better than that, child. For

I shall take you with me when I go my rounds, and teach you good practical parish work from the very beginning. I have a few cases on hand this morning, and you may as well go with me and begin at once.'

'Thank you, aunt. Can you come too, Fanny?' asked Maude almost ruefully.

'Not for an hour or two, dear, because I always write letters for papa and make up his accounts the first thing after breakfast. I could come afterwards; but I do not suppose aunt Barbara would like to wait.'

'That I certainly should not; besides, Maude, you and I will manage better alone. They say "two are company, and three are none," you know,' she added, with a grim attempt at a smile.

It was almost a failure; but Maude took the will for the deed, and responded with one as bright as summer sunshine, disappointed as she felt at leaving Fanny behind. When the breakfast was over she hurried up-stairs, and soon after made her appearance, ready to accompany aunt Barbara to the village.

As Harry had predicted, the news of Maude's arrival had caused a very great sensation there; for Jerry, the railway porter, proud of his discovery, had published it far and wide. All the morning long it had formed the one topic of conversation, not only under every cabin-roof, but in the highways and byways and wherever men did congregate in Ballycross. The excitement reached its crisis when news was brought that two ladies were coming down the road from the 'big house;' and when they reached the village every family flocked to their doors to greet her. Had Maude been alone, or with any other member of her

family, their reception would have been little short of an ovation; as it was, Miss Barbara's awe-inspiring presence fell like a wet blanket even upon the most loyal of the tenantry, so that the very boldest among them only made a faint demonstration of joy. But faint as it was, it was gall and wormwood to aunt Barbara's jealous temperament, and she did her best as she strode along to scowl them into silence; while, confused at finding herself thus suddenly become the object of general attention, Maude could only smile constrainedly and shrink closer and closer to her companion.

From Maude's earliest childhood, with an earnestness worthy of a Fénelon, Mrs. Carew had endeavoured to instil into her mind a deep love for her future tenantry. So well had she succeeded, that for years past the young girl had accustomed herself to look forward to her coming of age as a period when the interests of some hundreds of men, women, and children should be blended with her own, to be henceforward her dearest charge on earth; and so dearly had she loved this thought, that it had been all-sufficient to cheer her through the tedious dissipation of her life in London. She had pictured Ballycross as a sort of golden region, all peace, joy, and prosperity, with the greenest of pastures and whitest of flocks, wanting only shepherds and shepherdesses, *à la* Dresden, to make it a modern Arcadia. That morning-walk of disenchantment was one long agony; for poverty, misery, dreariness, desolation, met her eye at every step. Nor were the visits they paid by the way calculated to raise her spirits. Upon the occasion of Miss Barbara's first day's visiting in Ballycross she had been received with the greatest possible pleasure.

and courtesy ; upon the second, the Catholics had received her with cold politeness and evident distrust ; upon the third, some had refused to admit her, some had even insulted her ; and although the greater part, from respect to the family, had treated her with respect, they had given her to understand that in the matter of their religion they would suffer no interference whatever. Such visits as these aunt Barbara had not cared to repeat, and had thenceforward confined herself to Protestants, or to such Catholics as consented to receive her on her own terms. It was to the homes of a few of the latter class that she now conducted Maude ; and it would be difficult to say which our heroine found most distasteful—the poverty and dirt of the domiciles, the fulsomeness of the inhabitants, or Miss Barbara's style of conducting her visits.

Mrs. Carew had always taught her pupil that, as 'every man's house is his castle,' the homes of the poor ought to be approached with quite as much delicacy and respect as those of her own personal friends and neighbours. But Miss Barbara evidently held very different ideas upon the subject. With an air, combining in its dignity the authority of an empress with the imperturbability of a police-officer, she marched into cabin after cabin without knocking, overturning children and stools with her ample skirts, and electrifying the whole family with the loud pomposity of her voice. Once in, not a nook or corner of the domicile escaped her notice ; she peered into cupboards and under beds, and even into the children's mouths, to examine the state of their tongues, if they had been kept from the Protestant school on the plea of ill-health. Then, having ordered the firmest chair to be dusted, and having

seated herself thereon, she would set herself to cross-examine the whole family with an ingenuity worthy of the most eminent Q.C. that ever donned a wig.

Had they read the tract? What was it about? Had they been to church on Sunday? What was the text? What wages was the husband getting? Then, why couldn't he contrive to live on them, like a man, and not be always wanting charity? Did he go to the public-house? Did he ever beat his wife? Did the children go to the school? &c. Having duly extorted answers from her victims, received the last week's tract, and given another in its place, Miss Barbara would depart, greatly satisfied with her visit, followed by Maude in a state of boiling indignation. Poor child! She did her best to soften down the insolence of her companion by fondling the children, petting some blear-eyed old granny in the corner, or even by admiring the fatness of the family pig, if no other way to please presented itself. But Miss Barbara's signs, frowns, pokes, and nudges were too much for her, and, in most instances, the only attempt she could make towards friendliness was one of her own bright and beautiful smiles at parting. And yet Maude could well understand that Miss Barbara's category, made under other circumstances and in a different manner, might have done good—that the same questions, asked with sympathy in the voice and a great love for God's own poor in the heart, might have woven a bond of union between the questioner and the questioned, the rich and the poor; but to hear the husband railed at to the wife, the mother condemned before the children, the latter cross-examined as to the conduct of their parents, was more than her high sense

of right and wrong could bear, and she felt truly miserable.

The parish of Ballycross was so large, and the dwellings of such of its inhabitants as Miss Barbara had selected for her morning visits so far between, that by noon they had walked a very great distance, though they had only visited a few people. A very heavy rain had set in during the morning, and as Maude toiled homewards under her dripping umbrella, round boggy potato-fields and along almost impassable lanes, presenting a strong contrast to the busy scenes she had so lately quitted, many a tear mingled with the raindrops on her cloak. To beguile the way, aunt Barbara treated her companion to an enumeration of the conversions she had already effected in the parish, as well as those she had still in contemplation; but so absorbed was Maude in her own thoughts, that Miss Barbara's remarks fell all unheeded upon her ear. After a time, however, the trouble began to clear—for Maude was young, naturally buoyant, and possessed of a mind 'fertile in expedients'—and before she reached home a very bright smile had chased the tears away. 'Yes, I will be patient for the present,' she said to herself; 'for before very long I shall not only have the will, but the right and the power to make everything very different. It will be difficult up-hill work, for it is a miserable, miserable place, but I daresay it looks different in the summer; every place looks dreary in such weather as this. I wish dear uncle Edward was more energetic. I cannot think how he can take such wretchedness as this as a matter of course; but I will speak to him this evening; I daresay when he sees how much in earnest

I am; he will be in earnest too. I suppose, however, I shall not be able to do much until I am one-and-twenty; but when that time comes, I shall spare neither money, nor labour, nor time, nor anything I possess, to place things on a different footing. Till then, I suppose, aunt Barbara must do as she pleases; but when I am once mistress here, if she or any one else presumes to insult and torment and tyrannise over my tenants as she has done this morning—' Maud did not finish the sentence, perhaps because she found it difficult to determine what amount of vengeance could be legally taken upon the offender; but she looked very much as old Father Neptune must have looked, when he shook his fists at the young winds, and growled out, 'Quos ego—'

CHAPTER VII.

A SOAKING sleepy afternoon succeeded the drizzling rain of the morning, and Maude and Fanny, disappointed of a drive they had planned to Neville Court, were amusing themselves with a *tête-à-tête* instead. And very happy they looked, as they sat side by side on an ottoman near the fire, with Looloo nestling between them, discussing men, manners, and things in general with the profundity that might have been expected from philosophers of twenty summers. But whatever their deductions were, they drew them very merrily—too merrily for Miss Barbara, who sat in a distant window trying to hammer out ideas for a

pamphlet she had undertaken to furnish by a certain day, entitled the *Groans of Ireland*, and who fidgeted angrily on her chair and frowned fiercely across the room towards the ottoman at every fresh peal of laughter. At last every possible subject was worn threadbare, and they were just commencing an attack on that unfortunate scapegoat, the weather, when the door opened, and Mr. Neville entered. He had no sooner taken his accustomed place than Fanny slipped into hers—a low stool beside him. Maude drew another to his feet, and a happier trio did not exist at that moment in all Ireland.

‘Well, Maudie, my darling, and what think you of your future demesne?’ he asked, laying his hand gently on her head.

A very dark shadow fell upon the face just before so bright.

‘I am more disappointed in it, dear uncle, than I can possibly express,’ she replied sadly. ‘I had expected something so bright, and to my thinking it presents a picture more mournful, in its dreariness and destitution, than anything I have ever seen, or dreamed of, or read of in books.’

‘I am sorry to hear you say so, my dear; but I think your impressions will be different when you get more used to the place. You do not know what Irish people are yet. I cannot think that things can be very far wrong with such trustees as you have, and such an efficient agent as Mr. Colquhoun.’

‘Was he agent in my father’s time?’

‘Latterly.’

‘But not always?’

‘No; not till your father went to live in England.’

‘And when my father and mother lived here themselves, was it as it is now?’

‘No, Maudie; things were so different that I cannot bear to think of those days and compare them with these. The tenantry then were pictures of happiness and prosperity; it was a pleasure to go amongst them. Ah, my child, there is no eye, or ear, or hand, or heart, like a master’s own for keeping things straight; and your father, Maude, was a very good man, and a very talented one.’

Even this panegyric on her father was unheard in her earnestness about the one subject that engrossed her thoughts.

‘Do you like Mr. Colquhoun, uncle?’

‘Pretty well, my dear; but I very rarely see him.’

‘Most of the people seemed afraid to speak to me this morning,’ returned Maude; ‘but from what one or two of them said, though I appeared not to hear it, I could see that they dislike him very much.’

‘No doubt they do, and heartily; for of course, like every other man in Ireland who does his work well, the poor fellow comes in for his due share of ill-will among the tenantry. There is a friend of mine living here, Dr. O’Meara, who seems to think that he deserves it; but I cannot say I agree with him. Upon principle I make it a general rule not to interfere in the management of the estate; but in one or two instances that have come by chance under my notice, although I am ready to acknowledge that Colquhoun had acted rather harshly, he had not been unjust; and once, when I gave him a hint that I

thought him more severe than the occasion warranted, he put everything upon a pleasant footing immediately.'

'Will he have to continue here after I come into possession?'

'That will depend upon yourself, Maudie,' replied the clergyman, smiling; 'if I have a voice in the matter I shall advise you to continue with him. A change of agents would involve trouble to us all; and Colquhoun knows the estate and the tenantry, and is, I hear, punctual to a day with his payments. Depend upon it, he is not harder than other agents; besides, when you are mistress here, you will be able to keep him in check, especially if you meet him with that business-like little wrinkle in your forehead that is there now.'

Maude smiled, but it was a worried and almost sickly-looking smile, and the instant after she looked as serious as ever.

'I think when you look into the state of your affairs, as you must begin to do soon, you will find that your estate has been well and prudently managed. Still, my dear, a great deal of what you said about the people is very true, I daresay; and to tell you the truth, I do not think you have come, Maudie, before you are wanted. Mr. Colquhoun can go on collecting your rents and selling your timber; but we want some one here to take an interest in the homes of the people, and to visit the poor and sick, who, I fear, have been sadly neglected of late. Do we not, Fanny?'

'Yes, papa,' said Fanny, who had been looking very sad throughout the whole conversation.

Aunt Barbara's face at that moment, as she dropped

her pen and glared at the backs of the whole party, would have been a study for Hogarth; but in happy unconsciousness of her presence, Mr. Neville proceeded,

‘You see, my dear, my health is not as good as it might be; in fact, I do not think the climate altogether suits me. Besides, you know, Maudie, I am not as young as I used to be; and although the number of Protestants that compose my parish is small, with one thing and another, I cannot get about among them as much as I could wish. For one thing, you know, I undertake Harry’s education entirely myself; and then your poor aunt’s death was such a blow to me that I have really been fit for very little since. Ah, my dear, the parish, as well as everything else, had a sad loss in her, for she was every bit as good as a curate; and since her death, as Fanny has been too young to go alone, everything has been at a standstill. Now you have come, you can go together, and—’

At that moment a very decided rustle at the other end of the room reminded them that they were not alone; the next, Miss Barbara had crossed the apartment, and stood before them terrible in her offended dignity.

‘Well, I am sure, Edward; well, I am sure, sir! So this is the way I am treated after slaving for months in your parish. So I am to be entirely ignored, am I? and am to have my work undone. What difference does it make to the question whether Maude Neville is, or is not, the owner of this estate? Suppose she owned half the world, would that fact give experience to a girl of twenty, do you think? It seems to me to argue a vast amount of assurance in young persons of the age of these two, I must

say, to propose themselves for such a work. But let them try.

‘Yes, let them try,’ continued aunt Barbara, after a pause; ‘and let them see how long it will be before that wretched spirit of pauperism, manifested by these miserable Irish in whining and bewailing their poverty whenever a respectable person approaches their cabins, again runs rife in this parish; and how a couple of young girls, sent to undo my work among the people without a single word of warning or apology to me, will manage. Yes,’ she continued, growing even warmer and more energetic as she proceeded; ‘how long will it be ere they return to that familiarity of manner that I had so much difficulty in checking, and which it is so distasteful to refined minds to come into contact with? How long—but what signifies enumerating all the evils consequent on injudicious dealings with the poor? I have felt myself so competent for the work, and you, Edward, are always so occupied in your study—the clergyman winced in spite of himself—that I have never considered it necessary to trouble you with details; but, believe me, a great work has been going on in your parish.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Mr. Neville, trying to look penitent, but not feeling by any means as ecstatic as the occasion seemed to warrant.

‘Yes,’ continued Miss Barbara solemnly, ‘a work for which you will thank me till your dying day, when you once realise all that has been effected. Edward, when I came to this parish your people were encroaching paupers; they were familiar in their manners, they were lazy, they were obstinately set against reform, and last, not least, many

of them were Romanists;' and Miss Barbara clasped her hands as she slowly and terribly enunciated the last epithet.

'Are we to infer then, my dear aunt, that you have converted them all?' asked her nephew, smiling mischievously.

'I must say, Edward, that I am grieved, truly grieved, to see a man of your sacred calling indulging in levity on such a subject, when you ought to be falling down on your knees in gratitude. No, sir, I have not converted them all, though I have done my utmost. Thank God, I have not buried my talent in a napkin, whatever other people may have done. Without any vanity, I think I may say of myself that I have a cool clear judgment, and this, combined with a certain persuasive power, which I consider myself happy in possessing, has effected much;' and aunt Barbara smoothed her cuffs with great complacency. 'Of course,' she continued, after a short pause, 'more yet remains to be done; but when I reflect on those dear lambs of the fold that I have snatched from the ravening wolf, I say to myself sometimes when I lie down at night, "Barbara Neville, you are a happy woman."'

'Suppose, then, my dear aunt, since we are upon the subject, you give me the names of some of your converts,' said the rector, taking out his pocket-book with a brisk business-like air. 'I ought to call round upon them, and congratulate them, you know. Patrick Flanagan for one, I suppose?' and Mr. Neville smiled more mischievously than ever.

'Yes,' said aunt Barbara, looking rather nonplused, but very angry, 'Patrick Flanagan is one, and a very zealous one too. Have you anything to say against him?'

‘Nothing in the world, poor fellow. On the contrary, it is just what I should have expected; for he is converted every winter when the soup-kitchen opens.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

Mr. Neville gave her a quiet stare of dignified astonishment.

‘That is to say,’ she continued, feeling she had gone too far, ‘can it possibly be true?’

‘Everybody knows that, aunt,’ chimed in Harry, who had just entered the room; ‘I was going to tell you so myself one day, but you wouldn’t listen.’

‘You be silent, sir. But is it possible, Edward, that you have known this, and yet have—’

‘Given him soup! Of course I have, and have only regretted that he could think I should be pleased at his ever entering our church against his conscience. If I could only find time to go round among the people, I could make them understand better that what I give the poor is given quite irrespectively of their creed.’

‘There, then, I consider you are wrong, my dear nephew. It is astonishing how many conversions are effected by ministering to the temporal necessities of the poor.’

‘Very well,’ said Mr. Neville, ‘it may be so; but with all due deference to you, my dear aunt, when I effect conversions by such means, I hope I may be boiled down in my own copper for soup.’

A laugh from the young people, and a warning look, such as she had never seen before in the clergyman’s eyes, convinced aunt Barbara that she had better pursue the subject no further.

‘Suppose we go on with our names,’ said Mr. Neville, when the party was once more restored to gravity. ‘Who is the next?’

‘One that I think will surprise you, she belongs to such a bigoted family—Honora Mooney.’

‘What! John Mooney’s widow?’

‘No other. Are you not astonished?’

‘Not much, because I have heard that she is contemplating a second marriage with a Protestant. Do you mean to say she actually attends our church?’

‘I do. You have seen her there, Harry, have you not?’

‘Yes, aunt, twice; but last time she looked very cross, and told the man she was walking with, Will Summers, that she didn’t think much of it.’

‘Will Summers! No other than the bridegroom-elect,’ cried Mr. Neville, laughing.

‘Ah, but I have seen her since then,’ exclaimed Miss Barbara, looking very red and angry; ‘and it is astonishing what a little persuasive power will do. I left her “almost persuaded to be a Christian.”’

‘I saw her talking to Father Donovan in the lane yesterday,’ said Fanny quietly. ‘Her eyes were very red, and she passed me without even looking at me.’

‘Poor thing, then you may be sure she had been telling him of her conversion to the truth. If she had consulted me, I should have advised her to have done so by a letter, which I would have written; for we are poor frail creatures at the best, and Apollyon strengthens his ministers for their work.’

‘Father Donovan would be flattered, I am sure,’ said Mr. Neville; ‘but he is a good little man, and would bear

you no malice. I only wish I had the power over my people that he has over his;' and he heaved such a deep sigh that Fanny twined her arms round his neck, and kissed his white hair to comfort him. 'Who comes next?' he asked, after a pause.

'Denis Mahoney.'

'The biggest drunkard in the place! Thank you; Father Donovan is quite welcome to keep him.'

'But, Edward, he sees the error of his ways. I had a long and beautiful conversation with him on Thursday, and it ended in his promising to become a Protestant, and to take the pledge from you.'

'And what did you give him for all that?'

'Give him! Why, nothing, of course, except a trifle to make him a little decent for Sunday.'

'Then I am sorry to inform you that your well-intended trifle had a contrary effect, for it must have been under the influence of it that I saw him in the gutter that same Thursday evening. Ah, aunt Barbara, I expect that with all your experience you get taken in sometimes, as well as the rest of us! Go on with your names.'

'When one is made the subject of ill-timed ridicule, one naturally finds a difficulty in recalling names or anything else,' said Miss Barbara, with an injured air; 'but I will give you a case in which I am most deeply interested; it is that of Tim Murphy and his wife.'

The clergyman looked really astonished.

'What! Tim Murphy down the lane?'

'Yes, the very same; he and his wife, convinced by my reasoning, have consented to abjure the errors of Popery, and to bring up their children in the Protestant faith.'

‘Well, you do astonish me now, I must confess,’ cried her nephew. ‘I always imagined that family to be as firm as a rock itself in their religion; what can have changed them? Murphy has had some loss among his pigs, I believe, lately; and I suppose that has had something to do with it.’

‘Yes, it has; like harrow and plough it has broken up the hard earth and prepared it for the good seed,’ said Miss Barbara.

‘O aunt, I quite forgot to tell you,’ cried Harry, ‘but you remember the last time your friend Mr. Giles was here? Well, as you and he were walking home from church in the afternoon, I caught Tim Murphy pulling faces behind your backs.’

‘Why, you naughty boy, how dare you say such a thing!’ cried Miss Barbara, turning suddenly upon him.

‘Just because he did it; I turned the corner suddenly and caught him at it.’

‘You caught poor Timothy sneezing, I daresay; for let me tell you he has had a very bad cold in his head this winter; but making faces, never!’

‘Well, “seeing is believing,”’ muttered Harry; ‘he did pull faces, and I won’t say he didn’t for all the aunt Barbaras that ever lived!’

‘It is astonishing,’ continued Miss Barbara, ‘how very little interest either you, Edward, or any member of your family takes in the cause of the Irish Church Missions. I cannot understand it; to me the most glorious work in the world seems to be that of freeing Ireland from the grasp of the Beast. If you had been with me once or twice lately, what touching scenes you might have wit-

nessed, even here in your own parish ! Only one day last week I entered a cabin, where a starving family were huddled together without fire or clothes, with my Bible in one hand and a loaf in the other. How eagerly they snatched the food for the body ; and as they ate it how joyfully they listened to the tidings I had brought their souls ! What cared they, think you, for the mummeries of their creed, after I had spent half-an-hour in teaching them the precious truths of mine ? Ah, Edward, if you only appreciated my work as you ought, you would help me, at any rate with your influence, and would not suffer a man who did not renounce the degrading thralldom of Rome even to drive a plough on the Glebe lands.'

'It is a pity, my dear aunt,' said Mr. Neville, 'that you should waste your time by entering upon that subject again, seeing that I have already told you over and over again that I am a staunch advocate for freedom of opinion.'

'Freedom of opinion, indeed ! Well, well, wait till Romanism and Fenianism have worked their will upon you, with fire and sword, gibbet and thumb-screws ! Where will your freedom of opinion be then, I wonder !' cried Miss Barbara, with a gesture worthy of Cassandra. 'As to you two girls,' she continued, after a short pause, 'I intend to read you both to-morrow some extracts from my *Groans of Ireland*. That will touch you if anything will, seeing that every line is the result of personal investigation, and that every deduction bears the stamp of having been drawn by an unbiassed mind. My friend Mr. Giles has promised to write a preface to the work, and I intend to devote the proceeds of the sale to the funds

of the Irish Church Missions. You must sell some copies for us, Maude, among your friends in London.'

'Aunt Barbara,' said Maude, 'I have the greatest possible objection to being misunderstood, and therefore let me tell you at once that I hold the cause of the Irish Church Missions in utter abhorrence. I am an Irish-woman, and I love my country with a deep and passionate love, and I have studied her history well. What have I learned? That if there is one page more worthy of love and reverence than another, it is the long brave struggle of her Catholics for their faith; and that if there is one page in it more worthy of execration than another, it is the oppression she has received at the hands of her Protestant rulers. My mother was a Roman Catholic; and I sometimes wish that I myself had been reared in the same creed, that my heart might glow, as hers did, with the double enthusiasm of religion and patriotism. But I am not a member of the Roman Church, for I believe that, though right in her exposition of graver doctrines, she is in many respects faulty; and I believe that the Anglican Church, now restored to apostolic purity, is the true Church of God. Still, in my heart I feel persuaded that if it be a sin crying to Heaven for vengeance to rob the labourer of his hire, it is a sin, crying with a voice doubly terrible, to rob him of the birthright God has given him, his faith. If Protestants tried to convert souls as Catholics try to convert them, by warm prayers and cool arguments, who could blame them? But, as it is, I could die with a poor Catholic Irishman in helping him to defend his one single treasure against the tyranny of the strong, and the still more dangerous blandishments of the rich.' Maude's

eyes flashed so brightly, and her stately figure grew so majestic in her indignation, that Miss Barbara for the minute almost quailed.

‘Well!’ she exclaimed at length, partially recovering herself, ‘all this is fine talking, but it shows what comes of these new-fangled ideas in religion. I should like to know, miss, what difference there is between you and a Papist?’

‘So little,’ returned Maude, ‘that I trust the day will come, even in my lifetime, when the long-hoped-for union shall take place. I do indeed, dear uncle,’ she continued, addressing him in a sweet, almost deprecating, tone; for not only Miss Barbara, but Mr. Neville and his children, were looking at her aghast with astonishment; ‘but you must not be angry with me, please;’ and as she spoke she stole lovingly to his side.

‘Angry, my child, no; why should I be that? But of course I am surprised to hear my brother’s child utter such sentiments. But you and I will have a little talk.’

‘Yes, all to ourselves in your study, if you will let me come to you, and Fanny will not be jealous.’

‘I know too well what those little chats can do for me to begrudge them to you,’ said Fanny; ‘they are the bright spots in my life. Now don’t shake your head like that, papa; for you know it is the truth.’

Her father smiled. ‘If I ceased to comfort you, my child, it would be the power, not the will, that would be wanting. As for you, Maudie, my darling, come to me whenever you like; the old man’s door and the old man’s heart will alike open to you.’

CHAPTER VIII.

‘If you please, sir, Mr. Colquhoun is in the library ; and bids me say, if agreeable, he should be glad to pay his respects to Miss Neville ;’ and the old butler twirled the door-handle as he waited for his answer.

‘A most devoted swain, I must say,’ said the clergyman, smiling, ‘seeing that this is his second visit in two days ; for I forgot to tell you, Maudie, that he called upon you yesterday morning, while you were out with aunt Barbara. Will you see him, my dear ?’

‘Just as you wish, dear uncle. I suppose, as I shall have to be a woman of business for the rest of my life, the sooner I begin the better ;’ and Maude heaved a deep sigh of resignation. ‘Joseph, tell Mr. Colquhoun I will see him.’

There was something so unlike Maude in the hauteur of voice and manner with which she gave the order to the servant, that both Mr. Neville and his daughter looked up in surprise.

‘I cannot help it,’ she cried, laughing, and yet colouring slightly at the same time ; ‘it is very foolish, I know, but I cannot help feeling a kind of prejudice against that Mr. Colquhoun.’

‘It is foolish because groundless, my dear,’ said Mr. Neville gravely.

‘No, uncle, not groundless, after the deep tone of hatred in which I heard his name muttered yesterday ; though, as I told you, I thought it better not to seem to hear it at the time.’

‘Much better, Maudie; and not only at that time but at all times; for if it is an Englishman’s privilege to grumble at the weather, it is no less an Irishman’s to grumble at his landlord or agent, or both. Take no notice of what they say, my dear; they are a discontented set. Why, bless me, child, you owe Mr. Colquhoun a deep debt of gratitude; under some men the estate would have gone to wrack and ruin by this time!’

Maude could not imagine any ‘wrack and ruin’ more deplorable to her idea than what she had witnessed the day before; but she said nothing.

‘I expect,’ continued Mr. Neville, ‘that before long you will value Mr. Colquhoun as much as you now disfavour him. However little he may be liked by the tenantry, every one else about here seems to like him pretty well, I fancy.’

‘Except Dr. O’Meara,’ chimed in Fanny.

‘Yes, except Dr. O’Meara; but then, although the doctor is a good fellow, I have always thought his ideas rather quixotic.’

‘Do you like Mr. Colquhoun, Fanny?’ asked Maude.

‘Not much, dear; Dr. O’Meara has rather set me against him, I must say.’

‘And who is Dr. O’Meara?’

‘The principal doctor here. A great, tall, broad-shouldered, good-natured man; one of papa’s very great favourites, though I am dreadfully frightened of him, myself.’

‘Why?’

‘First, because he is so exceedingly clever; and secondly, because he has the reputation of being a kind of

woman-hater, though I cannot say I have ever seen it myself. He is exceedingly nice to me, and certainly one of the most gentlemanly men I ever met. As to Mr. Colquhoun, papa, I have no doubt, knows him better than the doctor. I have only seen him a few times, and then he was very pleasant to speak to; so I daresay you will like him before long.'

'I am sure she will,' said Mr. Neville.

'And I am almost sure I shall not,' said Maude, sighing, and looking very much worried.

Mr. Colquhoun had always flattered himself that he understood women well, no man better. This self-congratulation was not perhaps surprising on his part, seeing the ease with which, in a dingy den in Dublin where he worked the wires of a hotch-potch of agencies, he, day after day, twisted certain fair clients round his fingers, greatly to their loss and his own advantage. Nor was this all; in his own circle of society, where he sang a good song and rejoiced in what he termed 'the gift of the gab,' he had always been unanimously voted a ladies' man, while in his encounters with the tenants no woman's tongue had as yet been long enough or loud enough, or no woman's tears, prayers, or pleadings strong enough or powerful enough, to vanquish him. From what he had heard of Miss Neville's character and education, and from the glimpse he had caught of her girlish face, under her hat and feathers, by the sputtering oil-lamps at the station, he had seen no reason to anticipate any difficulty in bending her to his wishes and interests as he was accustomed to bend the rest of her sex.

He advanced to meet her as she entered leaning on

her uncle's arm, and bowed profoundly, displaying his white teeth as he did so to the best possible advantage; but for the first time in his life his wonted assurance forsook him, and he felt almost out of countenance. It was not her stateliness, though the dignity of all the Nevilles on the family tree could not have been better represented than by the dignity of her step, the quiver of that delicate nostril, and the arch of that haughty little neck. Mr. Colquhoun had been accustomed to dignity and dignitaries all his life, and knew how to disarm them by submission. It was not her beauty; for though Fanny thought that she had never seen anything so beautiful as her cousin's flushed and anxious face as she had left the breakfast-room, beauty had long since lost its influence over Mr. Colquhoun. It was not anything she said; for after a stiff acknowledgment of his obsequious salutation she remained perfectly silent, waiting for him to unfold the object of his visit. Perhaps the disturbing influence lay in her large, innocent, earnest eyes; for certain it is, after once encountering her glance, his own eyes fell, never again to be raised during the conference higher than the hat he held in his hand.

It was by no means in his favour that at the very first glance Maude recognised him as the man who had so annoyed her at the station by his insolent and overbearing manner to the well-meaning but somewhat blundering Jerry. Having placed chairs for the lady and Mr. Neville, Colquhoun resumed his own seat, and strove to rally his ordinary coolness and confidence; but in vain. Every pretty speech he had prepared fell flat, every compliment he uttered (as he afterwards expressed it) made him look

like a fool. He tried every topic of conversation, from Irish scenery to London lions ; but though Mr. Neville did his best to help him, the more he strove to interest the niece, the more bored and languid she looked. As a last resource, he spoke of the estate, a subject that effectually roused Maude from her apathy ; but his success brought with it but little consolation, for the remarks she made and the questions she asked showed so much of her father's aptitude for business, that the agent turned almost sick with apprehension ; and when, at the conclusion of the interview, he ventured to express a hope ' that it might be his destiny always to guard Miss Neville's interests as he had guarded them hitherto,' though he could not have said why, his voice quivered with perturbation.

At the end of about twenty minutes he rose from his chair, tired of his visit, and, declining Mr. Neville's invitation to partake of some luncheon, took his leave. Again his immaculate teeth gleamed on Maude at parting ; but a very angry spot burned on his cheek as he crossed the fields towards the farmhouse at which he lodged when at Ballycross.

' I shall not allow a chit of a girl like that to thwart me,' he muttered, as he opened the wicket, and kicked a dog that lay asleep on the footpath.

A visitor of a very different stamp from Mr. Colquhoun entered the house as he quitted it. This was no other than old Mrs. Barton, who could hardly realise her happiness as she clasped her young mistress, her darling of other days, to her heart. They had so much to say and talk about, that they were quite astonished when the luncheon-bell rang, and warned them that it was one

o'clock, and that Mrs. Barton's old cronies, the housekeeper and Joseph, were waiting dinner for her in the housekeeper's room.

'Well, and what does Mrs. Barton say to her "baby"?' asked Mr. Neville, as he threw himself into a chair between the girls after luncheon, and fondly patted Maude's bright hair. 'Was she pleased to see her?'

'Indeed she was, dear uncle, and said everything loving and kind,' replied Maude. 'Only imagine, uncle, how disappointed she must have been yesterday when we did not go. She says she had fires lighted in every room for us, and that the sight of them reminded her so much of old times, that having nothing else to do, she cried over them best part of the afternoon.'

'Poor old soul!' cried Mr. Neville. 'Well, Maudie, she has taken great care of everything for you. Thanks to her care, time has made much fewer ravages than might have been expected. I have no doubt it formed no small part of her regret yesterday that she had taken the pinafores off the chairs and tables for nothing. She told you all about the dinner-party next Monday, I suppose?'

'You may be very sure she did—not that she told me any news, for I have heard of nothing else from everybody ever since my arrival.'

'Do you know the origin of this same dinner-party, Maudie?' he asked, looking rather sadly into her laughing eyes.

'No, dear uncle; but I suppose it originated, as most dinner-parties do, in a love of good cheer and good company.'

Mr. Neville sighed.

‘I can see you have heard nothing about it, so I must tell you that, from time immemorial, it has been a custom for the master of Neville Court to give an entertainment to his tenantry on St. Patrick’s-day. To this your grandfather added a dinner-party to his friends the evening before; and your father, who had the greatest possible veneration for old institutions, made it a great point to keep up both. It was not, nor is not, altogether an easy matter, let me tell you, to manage the dinner-party. St. Patrick’s-day always falls in Lent; and although we are in the midst of lakes, and at a very reasonable distance from the sea, fish is by no means always easy to obtain. Yet obtained it must be, since a certain proportion of the guests have always been Catholic; and although it may chance to be one of their *jours gras*, as we never know for certain, it is better to err on the safe side, and get plenty of fish, even though we may have to send to Dublin for it. But now I must tell you how it happens that Neville Court (which is otherwise shut up all the year round) comes to be opened for this one entertainment, and why I, the rector of Ballycross, preside at it. From the time that your poor father succeeded to the estate to the day of his quitting Ireland, he never once failed to give this dinner-party with due form and ceremony; and at his departure he expressed a very earnest wish that I should continue to issue the invitations, and preside in his stead, until his return amongst us. From that time, Maudie, my child, until now, with the exception of two years only, I have continued to do as he wished. One of the occasions upon which I failed was the year he died, the second was last year;’ and his voice trem-

bled as he spoke. 'On each other anniversary I have been at my post; and although it has often been with a heavy heart, I have still felt a kind of mournful satisfaction in taking his place and acting his part. As to the tenants' feast, your mother was so completely the soul and mover of that, that at her departure we were obliged to discontinue it, and it has never been held since. But the old times are not forgotten here yet,' he added. 'Even now, when I go among any of the old people, those who knew her—especially among the Catholics, who seem to have enshrined every word she ever spoke to them in their hearts and memories—they often speak of St. Patrick's-day, as it used to be in her time, with tears in their eyes.' Something very like one stood in his own as he spoke, and for a few minutes the little party sat in a deep silence, broken only by the scratching of aunt Barbara's quill in the distance. 'Are you not very anxious to see Neville Court, Maudie?' he asked at length.

'Very, dear uncle; I was more disappointed than I can say at not being able to go yesterday.'

'Poor child! Well, dear, I have been thinking of a little plan that will introduce you to the old place very pleasantly. How would you like to help me to give the party?'

Maude and her cousin looked at each other in blank astonishment.

'Papa,' exclaimed Fanny at length, 'you forget it is a gentleman's party.'

'No, I do not, my dear. It was always a gentleman's party, but Lady Neville always entertained them after dinner in the long drawing-room, and that is just what

Maude and you could do now. It would really be great fun,' he continued, rubbing his hands gleefully, 'for I should let nobody into the secret but old Mills and Mrs. Barton. How surprised they would all be to find anything in the shape of womankind once more gracing the dear old room!' And again his voice slightly trembled. 'Well, how do you like my plan?'

'Delightful!' cried Fanny, ready to dance with delight.

'And you, Maudie? You are the party most interested.'

'I will do my best, uncle;' but her lip quivered nervously. 'Would it not be better for aunt Barbara to preside?' she whispered, glancing towards the little table.

'Certainly not, my dear,' answered her uncle, in the same subdued tone. 'Why, Maudie, you would spoil the *morale* of the whole affair! You, and no other, must play the hostess.'

Maude looked so miserable that Fanny could not forbear laughing. Just at this moment the pen in the corner stopped, and aunt Barbara cast a furtive but searching glance towards them. Mr. Neville immediately seized the opportunity to inform her of his plan, and invited her, in Maude's name, to join the party. The very fact that it had been proposed and adopted without consulting her would at any time have been a sufficient reason with aunt Barbara for refusing the invitation; but on this occasion, with her jealousy of Maude seething in her heart, her refusal was even more curt and ungracious than usual, and was accompanied by a glance that seemed to betoken something very like the 'envy, hatred, malice, and all

uncharitableness' that she prayed against every Sunday. Finding, however, that her nephew and his children were too much interested in their consultation to notice her ill-temper, she turned to her writing, and was soon, to all appearance, once more deep in the *Groans*.

Inspired at last by her uncle's assurances, Maude took heart, and after a little more conversation with him began to agree with Fanny that 'helping to give a party' might be very good fun after all.

'Of course it will,' cried Mr. Neville, rubbing his hands again. 'Why, Maudie, you could not possibly begin on a better occasion! We are few in number now; for death has been busy among us; and though one or two younger people may sometimes fill their father's places, it is not every young man that cares to meet such old fogies as most of us are now. The first time I sat in my poor brother's chair we were twenty-five, the last we were fourteen, and there have been changes even since then. So cheer up, Maudie; your guests will be few, unless the young fellows should chance to get wind of my little plan, and in that case I will not answer for it. But we will keep it to ourselves, child; and don't be afraid, for I am sure you will play the hostess to perfection. Depend upon it, pussy, we "lords of the creation" are far more easily pleased than our ladies. If you should get nervous, and pour coffee into tea, I promise you shall not be quizzed by any of your guests; but I would not promise as much, mind, if their wives were going to be there!'

CHAPTER IX.

ST. PATRICK'S-EVE arrived, and although dark and somewhat stormy, our little party from the rectory arrived in safety and high spirits at the east lodge of Neville Court. As the carriage wound up a steep drive, nearly half a mile in length, it may well be imagined with what earnestness the young heiress peeped out into the gloom; but dense shrubberies, looking very black and dreary in the darkness, and a dim network of leafless branches overhead was all that met her view. Nor was the result of her scrutiny much more satisfactory when Maude reached the house and alighted; for the united gleam of the lights in the windows, coach-lights, and stable-lanterns only seemed to make the darkness more palpable, and all that she could distinguish of her paternal home was a broad flight of gray stone steps, somewhat mossy and grass-grown, surmounted by a heavy portico of the same material. But that portico once passed, the gloom and darkness ceased; for the vestibule behind was flooded with light, and in that vestibule all that remained of the old servants had gathered, with loving hearts and bright faces, to welcome their young mistress home. The aged butler—a kind of universal genius in his way—had arranged them in a picturesque group, with the housekeeper at their head, while he himself stood in the foreground, bowing his white head in a series of profound salaams. Maude's entrance was the signal for a general burst of welcome, so vociferous in its heartiness that she clung, startled, to her uncle's arm. After a time, at a sign from the housekeeper, quiet

was restored; and then the butler, producing a highly ornamented scroll, prepared himself, with sundry preliminary coughs, to read an address of welcome to his young lady. Alas, poor Mills, that address was never read! Even at the 'Honoured Madam' the old man's voice began to fail, and the second line saw him fairly sobbing on his knees, with his cherished production crushed in his withered hands. Maude stepped lightly forward, and taking it from him pressed it to her lips, and told them all she should read it for herself, and keep it for ever as a testimony of their affection. As she spoke, the light fell full on her beautiful blushing face; and when she had concluded, another shout of love and welcome woke the echoes of the old house, the like of which had never been heard since her father had first brought home his bride to Neville Court.

If good Mrs. Barton could have had her own way, she would have conducted her young mistress through every nook and corner of the old mansion immediately on her arrival. But dinner-parties are always disturbing influences; and the one then in preparation in the large kitchen of Neville Court called the old housekeeper so many different ways, that could she have been in a dozen places at once she could hardly have satisfied its requirements. Very majestically did she usher the ladies up the grand staircase, and more majestically still did she descant on the various family-portraits that lined the gallery above. Dearly would she have loved to have told them the stories and legends that lurked in every grim old face they passed; but just as she was expatiating on a certain bewigged and beruffled pair, the clanging bells gave the first announce-

ment of dinner. Poor Mrs. Barton cut her story short, and hurried to a room which, she whispered to Maude as she turned the handle of the door, had once been 'my lady's.' And a grand old-fashioned room it was, such a one as Maude had never seen before; and the young girl glanced curiously round at the carved wood-work and antique furniture, the pride of Mrs. Barton's heart. But although everything around her looked novel and unusual, although the spaciousness of the chamber awed her and its very atmosphere seemed strange, blending, as it did, a certain shut-up fustiness with a faint aroma of herbs and spices, there was something in the flashing of the bright peat-fire that reassured her; whether it twinkled on the quaint oak wardrobes and cabinets, or ran in streaks of ruddy light across the polished floor, or buried itself luxuriously amid the heavy hangings of the distant bed, it seemed to bid her welcome.

Notwithstanding Maude's protestations that they needed no assistance, Mrs. Barton refused to leave until she had herself disencumbered them of their wrappers and seen them seated comfortably before the fire. Then, promising to warn them in time, and to send Mrs. Watson to them the instant she should arrive, the old woman bustled down-stairs, where she soon became heart-deep in anxieties and occupations, leaving Fanny to shape castles in the fire and Maude to dream of her mother.

Meantime the dinner proceeded quite to Mr. Neville's satisfaction; for it was well served and evidently well appreciated by the guests. But he had been right: the last two years had thinned still further the number of the latter. Still fewer hats adorned the antlers of the monster

stag in the hall ; still fewer of the old familiar faces gathered round the table. Many a sigh did the old major-domo heave as he stood at the back of Mr. Neville's chair ; and those sighs, though all unheard, found an echo in the hearts of more than one of the guests. Who could behold that narrowed circle without reflections strangely at variance with the clinking of glasses and the rattle of knives and forks ? Certainly not Edward Neville ; and although his face wore his usual kindly smile, as he discharged the varied duties of a host, there was a certain nervous twitching of the lip, and a certain far-away expression in his eye, that soon bespoke an inward conflict. To him death and change, like unbidden guests, seemed to sit on the vacant chairs, and low sad voices of the past seemed to mingle with every gust of wind that moaned without. In vain he struggled against his emotions ; for his mind, still unnerved by his late bereavement, refused to be schooled. It was a trying moment ; for he felt that his abstraction was already beginning to cast its shadow over the rest ; but though he would have given worlds to rally his spirits and be himself again, it was beyond his power.

It was just at this moment that the door suddenly opened, and to the satisfaction of everybody present our old friend, Richard O'Meara, presented himself. He excused the lateness of his arrival by informing his host that his business had compelled him to remain to the latest possible moment in Dublin, adding that, except for Jerry's kind offices in finding him a corner at the station in which to perform his toilette, and getting him a post-chaise afterwards, he could never have arrived at all.

The doctor had not been seated five minutes at the table before he perceived Mr. Neville's embarrassment, and quickly divining its cause, with the deepest sympathy strove to cover it. So quiet and unobtrusive, however, was his interference that no one perceived it, though all felt its power. For without trespassing on the vantage-ground of his seniors, or bringing himself prominently forward in any way whatever, the doctor made a charming substitute for his host, who many times smiled in sly gratitude across the table. The fact was Richard O'Meara possessed in a high degree the rare art of being able to lead a conversation, so as to bring forward each person's favourite topic in turn without suffering one man's hobby to weary the rest. Thus when Mr. Neville's old friend, Professor Broadview (who as usual had come up from Dublin for the occasion), had entertained the company, numbering three or four scientific men, for fully half an hour with an account of certain geological discoveries, an old fox-hunter *vis-à-vis* beginning suddenly to yawn, in five minutes' time O'Meara had set the whole party leaping fences and five-barred gates in imagination, until the old sportsman was almost choking with excitement. Then came the prospect of the crops, which wonderfully interested two agricultural squires, and whence they naturally digressed to the value of labour and the condition of the working classes. This brought forward the question of the 'tenant-law' in Ireland, and Richard O'Meara knew that another heart besides his own writhed beneath the sentiments of the whole party on the subject. He, and perhaps he alone, knew how, as a boy, the old gray-headed priest, Father Donovan, had been turned out of house and home; and

his quick eye alone detected the quiver of the old man's lip, and the flush on the old man's cheek. Before two minutes were over he had put an apparently careless question to the professor about the progress of the excavations at Rome, and in two more Father Dunovan was the centre of attraction as he gave an account of his own investigations during his five years' residence at the Irish College in the Eternal City.

Little by little Mr. Neville's abstraction wore away; the conversation gradually interested him; and the doctor, feeling he might now safely leave him to his own resources, descended from the height he had so unostentatiously occupied to the enjoyment of a quiet conversation with his neighbour, the professor. Nor was he mistaken, for Mr. Neville's spirits flagged no more during the remainder of the evening; on the contrary, his hilarity and good humour seemed to increase in proportion to his late depression. At length old Mills, who had been hovering restlessly round Mr. Neville's chair, succeeded in attracting his attention, and received from him certain directions about 'the ladies' that would rather have mystified the guests had they overheard them. But they only saw Mr. Mills walk majestically off at the end, as though charged with some unusually important business; while Mr. Neville, turning to the table, again joined in the conversation, which had now returned to the subject of the geological discoveries. He found the professor in the full tide of a dissertation on the labyrinthodon, which he contended must have been a frog considerably larger than an elephant—a statement so astounding to the old fox-hunter that he was sitting open-mouthed with astonishment.

‘By the bye, Mr. Neville,’ exclaimed the professor, ‘if I remember rightly, your late respected brother, Sir Morcar, possessed a cast of the tooth of this very animal.’

‘He did; it is in a cabinet in the long drawing-room with the rest of his collection.’

‘Which I remember is a very valuable one. If I could have this tooth for a few moments I could clearly prove my assertion that the labyrinthodon must be classified as a batrachian, and not as a saurian, reptile.’

‘Then there is a little commission for you, doctor,’ cried Mr. Neville; ‘for you must know,’ he added, turning to the professor, ‘that Dr. O’Meara likes no hand but his own to disturb the treasures I long since surrendered to his charge, because he appreciates them so well and arranges them so scientifically.’

‘Treasures, indeed!’ ejaculated the old squire; ‘did ever Christian man hear such gibberish before! The tooth of a frog, indeed! Fiddlesticks!’ And the old gentleman grew redder than ever in his indignation.

‘*Apropos* of specimens,’ cried the rector, as the doctor rose from his seat, ‘you will find one there that has just arrived from England. In my opinion it is a very charming one, but of course you may not agree with me.’

‘In what part of the room is it placed?’

‘I cannot say, but you will easily distinguish it.’

‘What kind of specimen is it?’ asked the professor, with great curiosity. ‘Is it beast, bird, fish, or reptile?’

‘I dare not give it its due classification,’ replied the rector.

‘Of course it is a fossil,’ continued the professor.

‘Not yet, though it belongs to a genus rapidly becoming extinct.’

‘Something of the old Tory species, perhaps,’ suggested the priest, smiling.

‘It is as innocent of politics as yourself, my dear Father Donovan,’ returned Mr. Neville.

‘I know—it’s an Irish wolf-hound,’ cried the old squire; ‘very rare breed that, nowadays.’

‘Wrong for once, squire. But, gentlemen, in detaining O’Meara you see we are acting like the ladies, who always try to find out from whom their letters come by examining everything but the signature. Make haste, doctor; and do not forget the labyrinthodon’s tooth in your curiosity.’

CHAPTER X.

As soon as Mrs. Barton’s anxieties, concerning the first courses of the dinner, had been set somewhat at rest by a considerate little message from Mr. Neville, that good lady resigned the reins of government into confidential hands, and hurried up-stairs to take a glance at her young mistress. She found her just fresh from the hands of Mrs. Watson with a *coiffure* that almost overwhelmed poor Mrs. Barton, but which, to judge by its magnitude and intricacy, must have been a masterpiece of the art. While Fanny underwent, in her turn, the amount of plaiting, frizzing, and torture necessary to insure a like result, the old kousekeeper hovered about her darling like a bee

over a rose, arranging flowers with almost fairy fingers, tying her sash, and finishing her off with the same light touches that, eighteen years before, she had loved to bestow upon her mother.

When all was ready she opened the door with no small display of ceremony, and conducted them down to the long drawing-room, wearing a much more satisfied expression on her own countenance than she left behind on that of Mrs. Watson. Having arrived there, she drew a low couch to the further fireplace, and then, with motherly care, placed a screen between them and the door, lest a wandering draught might stray in and find them out in their thin dresses. Then, though she fain would have lingered an hour at least, she hurried away, for housekeepers have little time for gossip when dinner-parties are on the *tapis*.

Those two young girls would have made a pretty picture, as they sat amid the massive and costly furniture of a fashion long gone by, their gossamer dresses floating like a summer cloud among its heaviness and gloom, and the firelight shining softly on their glossy hair and fresh young faces. How they laughed at the novelty of their position, and how strongly suggestive of romance and mystery everything around them seemed! How soon Maude's fanciful imagination peopled the apartment with the forms and faces of old-world novels, while Fanny drew upon her stock of Irish legends for phantoms and gliding spectres and a host of other unsubstantial unpleasantnesses that she always associated with old oak panelling. Of course they exchanged ideas, and of course, as it always does, the marvellous soon gained ground over the senti-

mental, and Maude sat and listened to stories of spiritual phenomena till, notwithstanding the superincumbent weight imposed by Mrs. Watson, her hair nearly rose on her head. At last, while a 'creepy crawley' sensation pervaded every fibre of their anatomy, Fanny commenced the history of an Irish chieftain's daughter, the last of her race, whose fortunes were to be foretold by a certain banshee. Twice already had this unamiable and shadowy personage appeared upon the scene, each time under extremely sensational circumstances, and Fanny was just describing her bat-like form as looming, for a third time, in the distance, when both girls bounded from the couch with a shriek, for, quite as noiselessly and suddenly as any banshee, a figure had approached and was standing between them and the screen.

It was only Dr. O'Meara. But never was banshee more ungraciously received; for though Maude almost immediately recovered herself, Fanny continued to shriek at him, as she clung to Maude for protection.

Extraordinary as such a greeting was, O'Meara seemed hardly to notice it; for if Fanny was startled, he was petrified. Who was that form before him? Could the grave have given up its dead and restored the friend of his youth to her old home? His question was soon answered by the bright flush of confusion that passed over Maude's countenance, and proclaimed her unmistakably flesh and blood; and then the doctor's agitation was succeeded by no small amount of embarrassment.

'A thousand pardons!' he exclaimed, drawing back. 'I really—that is to say, I only came to—'

'No apologies, if you please, Dr. O'Meara,' cried

Fanny, as coherently as she could, for her fit of terror had been succeeded by one of laughter almost as uncontrollable. 'It is I who ought to apologise for giving you such a reception, though really it was your own fault for coming in so quietly; you have nearly frightened us out of our senses, a terrible calamity for me, who have none to spare. Let me introduce you to my cousin, Maude Neville.'

'Between whom and myself an introduction can hardly be needed, seeing that we are friends of twenty years' standing,' said the doctor, smiling, though his voice trembled as he spoke. 'May I,' he continued, 'claim the privilege of a very old friendship, and be the first to swear fealty to the lady of the manor?' He knelt as he spoke, and, taking the hand of the blushing laughing girl, pressed it to his lips. 'Welcome to Ireland, fair queen! Welcome to Neville Court; and welcome, doubly, trebly, welcome to the Irish hearts that love you and yours so deeply, and have looked for you so long!' He commenced playfully, but there was a touch of pathos in his voice as he concluded that thrilled Maude Neville through and through. She felt that his was not the language of flattery, but that out of the fulness of his heart he had spoken, and had given her a genuine welcome home.

The doctor drew a chair to the fire. 'I understood from your uncle, Miss Neville, that you would arrive among us the first week in April; may I ask how long you have been in Ireland?'

'Four days; our plans were altered so suddenly that I can hardly believe even yet that I am here.'

‘What, four days!’ exclaimed the doctor, ‘and I have never heard a word of it!’

‘But you have been in Dublin, doctor, have you not?’ asked Fanny.

‘I have; but what of that? I always say, if “bad news travels fast,” good news ought to travel faster; but I suppose news of all kinds, like everything else, stands stock-still in Ballycross. But I really am vexed. I wonder Father Donovan did not write to me, I must say; or at any rate his nephew, Fred, the ‘Connaught News,’ as he is dubbed for his love of gossip.’

‘Father Donovan did not know it himself till yesterday. He called in the afternoon, but said he should not write to you as you would be home to-day. He seemed to think you would be very much disappointed at being away.’

‘Yes, because he knew what I went for. What do you suppose I have brought home with me from Dublin, Miss Fanny?’ asked the doctor, looking comically miserable.

‘Can’t possibly say, doctor. I might guess everything, from a wife down to a puppy-dog, and yet be wrong every time.’

‘Neither of those, I promise you, seeing that the first might quarrel with me, and the second would certainly quarrel with Bat. No; but I have brought home such a regiment of cases, boxes, hampers, and parcels, that Jerry seemed to think, as he lugged them out of the train, he should never come to the end of them. Now these various packages contain the paraphernalia for giving Miss Neville a triumphant entry; and is it not too bad, after all my preparations, to come home and find the object of them as

quietly seated in her drawing-room as if she had never left it ?’

‘It is, doctor; for once in my life I agree with you. But, do you know, I have a brilliant idea,’ added Fanny, after a short pause.

‘Pray give us the benefit of it.’

‘Well, as Maudie has come, and can’t possibly be sent back again, to come in gracefully, as Miss Morgan used to send me, suppose we have your *fête* when she is one-and-twenty.’

‘Hurrah, Miss Fanny; so we will! That certainly is a brilliant idea, far better than mine of a reception, for we shall have more time to prepare it in. What a day we will have!—flags flying, church-bells ringing—’

‘As well as one bell to each church can ring,’ put in Fanny mischievously.

‘*Bien entendu*. Then we will put up tents in the park, and keep open house to every man, woman, and child in the place; hang the old trees in the avenue with my Chinese lanterns and garlands, and finish up at night with such a display of fireworks that half the brains in Ballycross will be turned for a fortnight.’

‘Rather an undesirable result, doctor, I am afraid,’ suggested Fanny.

‘Not at all, not at all; the other way about might be a great improvement to some of them. Well, Miss Neville, you are the person most interested; what say you to your cousin’s idea?’

‘That I quite appreciate the intention of it; but, O Dr. O’Meara, if you both of you only knew how much, how very much, I dread any thing that makes a grand

lady of me ! I am so very happy as I am now ;' and Maude looked up at him with something so pleading and child-like in her manner that it quite touched him.

' I promise you, in the name of all your future tenantry, my dear Miss Neville, that nothing shall be done, even to welcome you, without your entire approval. But, remember,' he added seriously, ' each position has duties as well as privileges ; and as you are, or soon will be, a public character, I think you ought to allow us an opportunity of publicly testifying our affection for you.' He paused, but soon added more gaily, ' I do not see why Miss Fanny should monopolise the brilliant ideas, so I will give you the benefit of one that has just struck me. Suppose, since you have come in time for St. Patrick, Miss Neville, we keep his feast, as it used to be kept in days gone by, by giving a supper to the people.'

A flush of delight, worthy of her mother, was answer sufficient ; and he continued,

' Then we will ask Mr. Neville's permission. If he consents, I engage to gather in the guests. Mrs. Barton, I know, will stand our friend with the viands ; and as to the decorations of the old barn, we must all put our shoulders to the wheel for that ; besides, I know a man who is a dabster at decorations. May I ask you, Miss Neville,' he continued, and his voice trembled as he spoke, ' if, in the event of your uncle consenting, you will put in an appearance among your guests ? It is what your mother always did ; and believe me, if you follow her example, you will do more to win their affection than if you scattered gold and silver broadcast among them, like your grandfather at his chairing at the great election. You will think it strange,

perhaps, that I should be the one to suggest this to you. Some day I will explain my position here, and show you how, for this part of the parish at least, I unite, in my own poor self, the various offices of apothecary, attorney, mayor, and corporation ; for all the grandees, even our own parish priest, live at Ballycross ; and Neville Town, for many a long day, has had nobody but its clumsy doctor, and, in like manner, his father before him, to fight for its interests or settle its quarrels. But I love the dear old place ; it was the home of my childhood, and has wound itself so closely round my heart, with every man, woman, and child that it contains, that I myself shall be personally grateful to you if you will say a few kind words to our matrons and maidens to-morrow evening, and smile on the honest fellows with them. Will you ?' and the doctor's strong voice trembled with emotion as he asked the question.

'I will, indeed. Believe me, I shall be delighted to take part in any plan you may propose for the benefit of our people. I am only a young and very inexperienced girl, Dr. O'Meara ; but please do not look upon me as a sort of wax doll, only fit for a drawing-room. I long intensely to be useful and to do good, and shall be everlastingly grateful to you, or any one else, who will show me the way ;' and tears filled her eyes as she spoke.

'Now glory be to St. Patrick !' cried the doctor. 'Didn't I say he would do something for us this day ? and sure he couldn't do more than bring your own bright self amongst us to open the shutters of Neville Court ! God grant,' he added solemnly, 'that we may never live to see them shut again ; for it is my belief, and that of many an-

other man besides, that half the misery of ould Ireland may be traced to her closed shutters.'

CHAPTER XI.

GAY as Richard O'Meara had shown himself during dinner, he had nevertheless been all day long in an unwonted state of perturbation. For the lawyer he had consulted in Dublin, after carefully considering each of the cases he had laid before him, had that morning given it as his opinion that, although each one was sufficient to establish Colquhoun's moral guilt, the evidence of the whole was insufficient to convict him in a court of justice. He however advised him, as a friend, quietly to draw Miss Neville's attention to Colquhoun's various acts of tyranny and cruelty, and let them speak for themselves, warning him at the same time to be very cautious, since to tamper with the moral guilt of a rogue as sharp as Colquhoun would be as arduous an enterprise as to attempt to guide a ship through a floe of icebergs.

The doctor had paid his fee, and thanked the man of law for his advice, but had left his office very much crest-fallen; for besides the difficulty pointed out by the lawyer he saw two others of no less magnitude. The first was, how to reach Miss Neville for such a purpose as this, seeing that she was to remain her uncle Edward's guest for six months; which gentleman not only favoured Colquhoun, but would, he knew, highly resent the interference of a stranger in the management of the estate. The second

question was, supposing this difficulty solved, would he be able to influence Miss Neville? What would she be like? In all probability a Neville to her finger-tips, a cold, proud, reserved young woman, who would highly appreciate Mr. Colquhoun's aptitude for squeezing money out of the estate, and leaving its owner in peace. All day long he had revolved the question, with its threefold difficulty, in his mind, but had found himself just as far from solving it, when he had lumbered up to Neville Court in Jerry's postchaise, as when he had quitted Dublin in the morning. Little did he dream of the magical turn that Dame Fortune intended to give her wheel that evening in his behoof.

That a labyrinthodon's tooth is an item well worthy of respect and consideration we are fully prepared to admit, but we question very much if the labyrinthodon himself would have received much attention from Richard O'Meara, if he had stood that night by the side of Maude Neville. What the party in the dining-room said to the non-appearance of their messenger, we know not; but very certain it is that he returned no more. He sat instead, lost in a delicious dream, half happiness, half sadness, still striving to realise the truth of the vision, as the bright young face before him flashed its radiance over a spot for him so long only haunted by the ghosts of the past.

As to Maude herself, the deep longing wish of her heart was more than satisfied; for not only had she found one who had known her mother, but one who seemed still to love her memory, almost as dearly as she did herself—one, moreover, who had known her in the most intimate relationships of life. For nearly an hour Maude

asked question after question of her new friend, with a delight only equalled by his in replying to them, nor was the subject changed until Fanny (not perhaps quite as deeply interested in it as her companion) made a remark upon one of the paintings on the opposite wall. This led to a tour of the apartment, during which the doctor explained the subjects of the paintings, opened the cabinets, and, rifling caskets, brought to light twenty things they would never have discovered for themselves. Then, though Fanny still continued her examination, the doctor and Maude returned to their seats, when the latter soon became highly interested in the glowing account he gave her of the people among whom her lot was henceforward to be cast.

‘I like this idea of the tenants’ feast on St. Patrick’s-day,’ said Maude. ‘What a pity it comes in Lent!’

‘It is a drawback, certainly, but one that has been in existence long enough to grow into a matter of course,’ he added, smiling. ‘This year, however, it will matter comparatively little, for to-morrow is not an abstinence-day, and as to fasting—very few working people do that. Though even if it were otherwise, I can assure you an Irishman would munch a dry crust with the best possible good-humour for his conscience’ sake. But I am very glad that to-morrow will be a *jour gras*, for to watch your guests’ enjoyment of their roast beef will be by no means the least enjoyable part of the evening.’

‘Is this dance on St. Patrick’s-night an old institution?’ asked Maude.

‘Very; it evidently dates back to the period when your family was a Catholic one—though, by the bye, after all,

this is only to the time of your paternal great-great-grand-father.'

'Was he a Catholic?' asked Maude, looking very much surprised.

'Yes, and all his children also except his youngest son, who became a Protestant, and who seems to have had a better reason for embracing a new faith than he could have given for abandoning the old one;' and the doctor's cheeks kindled as he spoke.

'And what was that?' asked Maude.

'The manor of Neville Court,' replied the doctor. 'You must know, my dear Miss Neville, that among other acts of tyranny exercised by England over her weaker sister was that of passing an iniquitous law by which a younger son could succeed to an estate, to the prejudice of an elder, if he chose to abjure the Catholic religion and become a Protestant. Now this is precisely what your ancestor Michael Neville did.'

'And why should he not?' asked Fanny. 'I know you were very pleased when your old friend Professor Broadview became a Catholic, so why should you blame our old ancestor for turning the other way? No doubt he acted from conviction, poor man!'

'I am sorry to say, Miss Fanny, that, unlike the rest of his family, who were noted for their piety, Sir Michael Neville was a man with whom religious convictions would not be likely to have much weight. He was a gambler, a spendthrift, and a *roué*, and died at last by his own hand in a fit of drunken despair.'

'Besides,' said Maude, 'would he have supplanted his brother had his conversion been genuine? Would not

Protestantism have taught him that such an action was black injustice, however lawful an iniquitous law might render it?

‘I forgot that,’ said Fanny. ‘Then he was a mean miserable old man, and I am very sorry that we are descended from him!’ and she walked away to examine another picture.

‘And what became of the Catholic branch?’ asked Maude, fixing her large earnest eyes on the doctor.

‘God only knows. They and their children wandered away, and were soon lost in the obscurity of common life. But we may fairly presume that their children still keep the faith their father valued before his birthright in the highways and byways to which they wandered, and where they probably swell the ranks of tinkers, tailors, and other honest artisans, who earn honest bread by hard toil, and look to heaven for rest. But,’ he added, ‘when the day shall come when God shall make up His jewels, we shall see how God can recompense those who suffer for the faith, and Michael Neville himself shall see whether he gained much when he gained Neville Court.’

‘Or his descendants either, perhaps,’ said Maude musingly.

‘Not so,’ he replied; ‘his descendants of these days only take what is now theirs by lawful inheritance. As I have just said, the true heirs are scattered far and wide, and will never be known till the day of judgment. But I do think that one duty is incumbent on those who sit in their places, and that is to protect the interests of their Catholic tenantry, remembering that but for an act of insolent injustice, the more bitter because planned by an

Irish heart and executed by an Irish hand, they would have lived under a Catholic proprietor. If my story, which is no secret here, but familiar as a household word, shall have had the effect of inclining your heart in favour of those among your people who profess the good old faith, I shall not have told it in vain.'

'It is needless after that to inquire whether you are a Catholic, Dr. O'Meara,' said Maude, smiling.

She little imagined how painfully her words jarred upon his ear, revealing as they did only too plainly what an utter stranger he was to her.

'I am, by the grace of God,' he replied very quietly; 'do you pity me?'

'I do not; for some things I even congratulate you.'

'That is just because she is a rank Ritualist, doctor,' cried Fanny. 'I am sure I pity you from the very bottom of my heart, and only wish I could convert you.'

'So do I, Miss Fanny,' cried a voice behind her, and turning round she beheld the bright face of Father Donovan, who was advancing towards her with extended hand, followed by the professor.

'O, O!' cried the latter, as soon as he caught sight of the doctor, 'this is how we come to look for fossils, is it? So nobody but Dr. O'Meara has the key of the cabinet! I like that idea immensely. Where's the tooth, you rascal? ay, and where's the specimen?' And as he spoke he smiled upon the little group till his blue eyes twinkled again with mischief.

The rest of the party soon followed, and we need not say how thoroughly Mr. Neville's little surprise was appreciated. Nor need we tell how gallant the 'old fogies'

grew as they hovered round the tea-board that soon made its appearance in the good old-fashioned way, nor how well Maude presided, though she did make a few blunders through accepting the doctor's assistance.

Of course all the guests concurred in assuring their host that his 'specimen' was all that he had described—'except,' objected Father Donovan, 'that she belongs to a genus fast becoming extinct.'

'I am afraid you will be constrained to agree with me, my dear Father Donovan,' said Mr. Neville, 'the next time you visit any large city;' and he described with horror certain 'girls of the period' whom he had encountered in London.

'And who will pass away with the period, my dear sir,' said the priest, 'like the grotesque fashions they patronise. No, God will take care of us; and as long as the world shall last the race of good, earnest, and pure-minded women shall never become extinct.'

The doctor's proposal concerning the tenants' feast met with the heartiest approbation from Mr. Neville, who, however, was of opinion that it had better be put off for a day to give more time for the preparations. But the doctor, who started then and there in search of Mrs. Barton, soon returned with the intelligence that she believed they could manage it for the day itself; and in face of such an authority Mr. Neville could say no more.

As the doctor sat that night in his own little parlour, concocting his usual 'night-cap' of whisky-toddy, a very bright smile lighted up his good-natured face. His problem had been solved, and solved most charmingly; for not only had he encountered the formidable Miss

Neville, so long the object of his dire forebodings, but he had found her far more bright, more beautiful, and more gentle than any woman he had ever yet met on earth. No wonder the doctor lay awake half the night thinking of to-morrow, and that when he fell asleep at last it was to dream of Maude Neville.

CHAPTER XII.

ST. PATRICK'S-DAY dawned clear and bright, and was welcomed as usual throughout the length and breadth of green old Erin with a universal shout of joy. But brightest where all were bright was Richard O'Meara as he returned from Ballycross, where he had been to Mass, picking his way over the still boggy meadows, and turning over in his mind the now fast brightening future.

He had just left Father Donovan, like himself, almost too much delighted to realise the happy turn events were beginning to take. They had been talking over the best way of summoning the guests for the evening, and the priest had charged him with a message for Mr. and Miss Neville, expressing his regret at having found a note on his return home the previous evening reminding him of a long-standing promise to preside at a temperance meeting, to be held in a town about fifteen miles distant, on St. Patrick's-night. This promise he was of necessity bound to keep, but he bade him assure them that he should compromise matters by leaving quite half his heart at Neville Court.

The doctor's first proceeding, after his breakfast, was to collect around his garden-gate about two dozen urchins of all ages, sizes, and degrees of raggedness, and stimulating them by earnest money in the shape of halfpence, and promises of no end of good cheer to-morrow morning, to despatch them to all points of the compass with a general invitation. Never since the days of the 'fiery cross' did messengers run with fleeter foot or better will; and the result was a state of hubbub and stir throughout the whole of Ballycross, such as had never been seen therein for many a long day, and which bothered Mr. Colquhoun more than he cared to show. Not that anything was said or done to alarm the fears of the agent more than any one else, but the whole thing betokened a change in existing institutions highly distasteful to his already perturbed spirit.

About eleven o'clock the doctor arrived at Neville Court, and after another long consultation with Mrs. Barton and old Mills, he made his appearance in the morning-room, flourishing in his hand an enormous scroll of 'Welcome' that he had painted while in Dublin. Had Miss Neville smiled an approval of his artistic skill only half as sweetly as she did he would have felt himself more than rewarded for his pains; as it was he could hardly believe it possible that so slight a task should meet with so rich a reward. His arrival was the signal for a general move to the large old barn that, in the days of Sir Morcar and his lady, had been the scene of many a rustic ball and banquet. And a fine sensation they caused among the poultry and turkeys, who scuffled off in every direction; while the geese stretched out their long necks and followed them

scolding, to Harry's fancy, who arrived at that moment on his pony, like so many aunt Barbaras.

There was some discussion concerning the style of decoration ; but that important matter once decided, the work began in earnest. Barrow-loads of evergreens arrived, to be nailed up over the rough walls, with coloured calico and banners between ; and as soon as that was done the doctor added some odds and ends of old armour, and certain foxes' heads and brushes, that gave the whole a most artistic effect. But if the doctor was indefatigable Harry seemed to be positively ubiquitous, while the ladies sat, in the middle of the threshing-floor, up to their very eyebrows in flowers and leaves, weaving elaborate garlands. The only persons who could find nothing to do were the rector and Professor Broadview. They, after standing in everybody's way for about an hour, and getting their elbows knocked and shins grazed every five minutes, quietly beat a retreat, and a little later might have been found in the study of another old bookworm, about a mile off, as deep in folios and science as their friends in evergreens and paper-roses.

By the afternoon all was finished, and then the ladies, with O'Meara and Harry Neville, started out for a walk. Of course their first visit was to the quaint old-fashioned garden that surrounded the house, and there, though the trees were still bare and leafless and the shrubs in the garden still wore their winter garb of matting, Maude was delighted with all she saw. The old head-gardener positively trembled with excitement as he conducted his young mistress from greenhouse to conservatory, and from one garden to another. But Maude's

kind glance reassured him ; and her unqualified praise of the trimness of everything she saw made full amends for the long dreary years during which poor O'Keefe had sighed over his flowers as they faded unseen, and mourned over his wall-fruit as it decayed on the trees unused. The grounds were really very beautiful, for O'Keefe had done much out of pure love of his craft ; ' but now,' ran his thoughts,—' now that the young leddy, God bless her ! had come back to gladden their eyes with the sight of her, he would do more, twenty times more.' Indeed, Maude was hardly out of sight before the old man began to lay out fresh beds in his imagination, and to raise glass-houses, such as gardener's brain had never before planned in all Connaught.

Instead of leaving the garden by the ordinary entrance the doctor led the way towards a little door in the wall, almost hidden by the redundancy of the ivy and other creeping plants that overhung it. After some fumbling on his key-ring for one especial key, and after considerable resistance on the part of the long-unused lock, our little party found themselves on a plateau of turf, from which a narrow path wriggled and twisted down the mountain, forming a private communication between the house and the village of Neville Town that lay below. It may be imagined how eagerly his three companions assented to the doctor's proposal of a visit to the same, seeing that it involved that most exquisite of all delights to the young—a scramble. And a scramble they had. What merry peals of laughter rang through the old woods as they ran down paths that the winter rain had laid bare to the parent rocks, or when, the path having given way, they

leaped, with the aid of the doctor's hand, from one broken crag to another ! Sometimes the road would make a sudden turn, and instead of following it they would dash in among the tangled brushwood, sinking luxuriously into beds of last year's crisp brown leaves, or slipping, gliding, sliding deliciously downward over the places where the fir-trees, from generation to generation, had shed their dark-green spines. How poor Fanny shrieked as she crossed the crazy planks that formed the bridge over a boiling mountain torrent, and when Harry would persist in sitting on a railing that overhung the same, though it rocked beneath his weight ; and with what intense enjoyment Maude gazed upon the views of wild and picturesque beauty that the doctor pointed out from time to time ! Sometimes a glimpse of the rippling lake, sometimes of a gray old mountain crested with pine-woods ; sometimes a peep of the village at their feet, with its scattered cabins ; sometimes a tract of dark bogs, which the rich glow of the setting sun had transmuted into burnished gold.

‘What is that ?’ she asked, pointing to the horizon ; ‘it looks like a distinct triangle suspended in mid-air.’

‘It is the summit of Croagh Patrick,’ he replied ; ‘that is to say, of St. Patrick’s mountain. It often takes that strange appearance when the mists rise. It always seems to me as though the grand old mountain imitates the saint, who loved it so dearly in days gone by ; for as St. Patrick raised the standard of truth high above the mists of ignorance, and the clouds of paganism that then obscured our beautiful island, so does Croagh Patrick raise its clear-cut triangle, that truest symbol of the Triune God, high above mist and cloud, as though ever striving

to remind the children of the saint of the faith that their father taught them.'

At this moment a shout from Harry announced that he had reached the end of the descent, and the next moment showed them that young gentleman astride upon the wicket that terminated the path. Here he formed the centre of attraction to about half a dozen little ragged rascals, who were cheering him lustily, much to Harry's amusement. On the appearance of the ladies, however, they all scuffled off; and in less than five minutes the news had spread like wildfire throughout the village of Neville Town, that 'the young lady, God bless her! was coming, with the docther and all the rest of the ginthrey at her back.'

It would be impossible to describe the burst of loyalty that welcomed Maude Neville to her native village. No queen could have been received more proudly, no home-returning wanderer more joyfully, no long-lost child more lovingly. Catholic and Protestant, old and young, men and women, hale and sick, flocked to meet her, while the children thronged upon the pathway, or cried 'Hurrah!' in the gutters. As they gazed upon the sweet young face before them, bright and fresh as a rosebud with her run down the mountain, all the faults of her father, cold and neglectful as he had grown to them before his death, were forgotten, and they loved his child already with all the enthusiasm of their Irish hearts. When they reached the smithy the sound of the hammer suddenly ceased, and the old blacksmith, rushing into the road, flung himself at Maude's feet, and having kissed her hand, reverently prayed for every blessing his warm heart could imagine

on her head. The doctor was deeply moved, while Maude, whose simplicity was terrified at so much homage, clung to his arm, and fairly sobbed. But it was not for long; she soon grew calmer, and told them how glad she was to be in her native country once again, and how she hoped never, never to leave it more. Young as she was, the prospect of a resident landowner seemed to lighten half their cares; and as the almost whispered words were repeated through the crowd, a cheer arose so wild and loud, that it echoed through the pine-woods and across the lakes, and only died away among the distant mountains.

CHAPTER XIII.

As fashionable hours were evils unknown to the good people of Ballycross and Neville Town, the evening shadows had hardly begun to fall when the guests began to arrive. Dinner had been ordered at an early hour at the hall, in consequence of the feast, but it was only half over when a bustle began outside. Merry peals of laughter and gush after gush of mellifluous Irish rang in the evening air, and warned the doctor, who was to be master of the ceremonies, that his services were already in requisition. The instant dinner was over Maude proposed an adjournment to the scene of the festivities, a motion strenuously seconded by her cousin; and although the two old gentlemen glanced wistfully at the sherry, and groaned in spirit over the port, that still stood uncorked on the sideboard, it is needless to say that the ladies carried the day.

A large proportion of the guests had arrived when Maude entered the barn, leaning on her uncle's arm, and hearty were the cheers and bright the smiles that greeted her. Mr. Neville could hardly believe his eyes as he glanced around him—for the dingy old barn seemed positively transformed into a hall of light, now that the doctor's wonderful chandeliers of hoops and ivy were lighted up, as well as the sconces that he had placed among the holly boughs on the walls. Mr. Neville acknowledged their greeting in a few kind words, and then our little party moved forward to some seats at the upper end of the room, where many of the elderly people had already congregated. With heartfelt delight the poor old souls clustered round the young heiress, shaking her hands, blessing her, and welcoming her to their heart of hearts, manifesting in every word that innate politeness and sweet simplicity so characteristic of their Irish nature.

We shall not attempt to describe the scene of festivity that followed. No English pen could possibly do it justice, however truly an English heart might appreciate its innocent healthy gaiety. It was all that an Irish feast could be, kept up with rollicking Irish spirit, and nobody enjoyed it more thoroughly than Maude Neville. Of course she opened the ball with Dr. O'Meara; after which the dancing was kept up with so much vigour, and so few interruptions, that the only wonder was that either the dancers, or the old fiddler, could possibly hold out so long. Short, however, as were the intervals, Maude took advantage of them to make friends with her guests, and during the earlier part of the evening she passed from one bright little group to another, with either her uncle or one of

her cousins. After a time, however, a chance remark, dropped by Mr. Neville, on the 'flux and reflux of the dancing throng,' plunged himself and the professor once again into an argument they had been holding all the afternoon on the tides; and when the next pause occurred in the dance Maude looked round in vain for a conductor. Her uncle was far too deep in centrifugal force to pay any attention to appealing eyes, however bright; and as Fanny and Harry had gone to the house to help with the supper, Maude, far too retiring to venture across the room alone, was seating herself again, with a sigh of disappointment, when the doctor's stalwart arm presented itself. She smiled her thanks; and as together they passed down the room it would have been difficult to have found a happier man in all the world than Richard O'Meara. The one wish, the one hope, the one prayer of his life seemed to have been answered, for in the quivering lips and beaming eye of the young heiress he seemed to see a presage of the happiness of her people. What mighty streams of love might take their sources in her friendly whispers to them! What years of deep devotion, such as they had paid her mother, might have their birth in those kindly smiles! 'Would to God she were a Catholic!' And the exclamation, though all unheard, found a response in many a heart around them.

After a very short interval the fiddles struck up again, and the dancing recommenced. The doctor led Miss Neville to a chair, and there being no longer any swains too bashful to find partners for themselves, seated himself beside her. As he did so, a gratified expression stole over her face that would have sorely puzzled her friends in

May Fair. 'What could it matter to her,' they would have asked, 'the courted, petted, beautiful heiress—to her at whose feet during the last two years so many noble names and princely fortunes had been laid in vain; what could it signify to her whether that country doctor sat and talked to her or not?' Nothing surely, yet certain it is that she did look pleased, and listened to his conversation with an interest that would have turned her London suitors green and yellow with jealousy.

She could hardly have done otherwise, for though his theme was only the joys and sorrows of a few poor obscure Irishmen and Irishwomen, he spoke with the impressiveness of a philanthropist who, all unmindful of himself, pleads the cause of others. She had herself commenced the conversation by asking him a question concerning the potato famine, a subject on which he gladly enlarged, because it had happened during the residence of her parents on their estate, and served him as an example to show her how even such a scourge as that might be alleviated by the care and forethought of a kind-hearted and sensible landlord—by one who understood not only the duty, but the policy, of assisting his tenantry in their distress, and of leaving no means untried to mitigate their sufferings. He described to her how, by the care of Sir Morcar, the solicitude of Lady Neville, aided by the untiring devotion of the parish priest, the Neville estate had suffered less than any other around them, and had sooner recovered from the shock. Then he reversed the picture, and showed her the change that had taken place in the condition of the people in consequence of her father's absence and her own minority. He embellished nothing, sup-

pressed nothing, levelled no word of reproach or opprobrium at Colquhoun, but told her, in words of plain unvarnished truth, all that the tenantry had endured during the long years that had passed since Sir Morcar had first left them at the mercy of a stranger. It was a weary tale of suffering and oppression, and his deep voice trembled with emotion as he spoke of entire families turned out by the wayside to make way for richer tenants; of old men dying of broken hearts in the parish union, of young ones goaded by desperation to a desire of vengeance that Father Donovan's constant and unwearied efforts had alone kept in check.

With her whole soul in her eyes, Maude sat and listened to him as, in low earnest tones, he told her this, mingled with story after story of silent suffering and hidden deeds of heroism, till at last the whole scene of revelry, with its music and joyous faces, appeared to pass away, and Maude seemed to be following him, trembling and alone, through all that her people had seen and suffered since her father had quitted them. He ceased at last, and for a few moments both sat silent with emotion; he praying with all his heart that his simple words might bring forth fruit, she that she might one day learn to love her people as he did.

'Dr. O'Meara,' she asked at length, suddenly raising her head, 'why has my uncle done nothing to prevent all this? He has a horror of oppression.'

'I know that; but there is a time-honoured adage, "None so blind as those who will not see," or, as we might say in his case, as those who fear to see. I think I need not tell you, my dear Miss Neville, that your uncle

possesses many good qualities, both of head and heart, but there is a certain indolence and inertness in his character that spoils them all. He wishes to do well and means to do well, but he stops short at the intention. To-day he sits in his easy-chair, broods over grave evils, and purposes doing something towards amending them to-morrow; and when to-morrow comes it finds him shut up in his study, immersed in his books, and the evil remains undressed, or is redressed too late. There are many excuses, I know, to be made for him; amongst the strongest, perhaps, the very handsome income he derives from his living. It must be a great temptation to a man—naturally averse to business—to enjoy life, when he has such ample means for doing so placed at his disposal, without the necessity for any exertion on his own part. For the spiritual and temporal wants of the handful of poorer Protestants in this parish are soon attended to; and though Mr. Neville, in his liberality, would as soon give to Catholic as Protestant (for he hates intolerance), he really has been so little among the people, especially since poor Mrs. Neville's death, that he is almost as great a stranger to the one as the other. I trust that now you have come among us better days are about to dawn; but I assure you that I myself for the last four years, and my father before me for fifteen, have fought our battles for your tenantry almost single-handed. For as to Father Donovan, poor man! though his whole heart is with the people, except by his prayers, he has been able to effect very little, as you may imagine, when I tell you that his parish extends over more than a hundred square miles, and that he has only two assistant priests to help him in his ministrations.

His position, and that of Father M'Grath before him, is an exact inversion of your uncle's; for where they would have done good if they could, he might have done good if he would. God grant, Miss Neville, in His infinite mercy, that the same may never be said of you !'

He glanced at her as he spoke, and saw such heavy tears standing in her eyes that his heart almost reproached him for the words he had spoken. At this moment Mr. Mills made his appearance, and held a short consultation with the doctor.

'Would you like to come to the servants'-hall and see the supper laid?' asked the latter, turning to Maude.

'Very much.' He offered her his arm and led her from the room, amid the whispered blessings of the guests. As tenderly as a mother he muffled her in a heavy shawl, and thus, once again offering her his arm, they passed out, with the old man-servant, into the quiet darkness.

'We will not attempt to cross the strawyard to-night,' he observed; 'it is very little farther round by the drive, and it is a much safer road in the dark, for Mills has come without a lantern. We may, perhaps, meet with a Scylla in the form of the gate-post, but at any rate that will be more pleasant than a Charybdis among the ducks!' He spoke playfully, but the moment after relapsed into silence that was not broken till they reached the gate that opened upon the drive.

'The world would say, Miss Neville,' he observed at length, 'that I have this evening chosen unfortunate subjects wherewith to entertain a young heiress in the first flush of her dignity; but then the world could not understand all that I feel when I see the present state of things

on your estate, and think of the power and responsibility God has given you. Believe me, it is one not often placed in the weak hand of woman, for it is one that may influence for good or evil the lives of hundreds; nay, one that, if abused or misused, may even affect the welfare of their immortal souls. But you may justly ask why should a man like myself, who can throw the weight of neither years, wealth, nor position into the scale—why should I be the one to come forward as their champion? Only because I believe it to be the will of God. Let me tell you why. I have already told you of the life-long friendship of our mothers, of my father's position and work in this parish, and of the circumstances of my own childhood, and subsequent education for my father's profession. But this profession, Miss Neville, happy as I am in it now, was not my own early choice. I entered it to please my father without a word of demur; but during the whole of my career as a student, and for some two or three years afterwards, every thought and aspiration turned to the priesthood, and at last I wrote and told my father the truth. Unlike many parents, who would have seen in my new aspirations only the frustration of their hopes, he wrote me a letter of the warmest, holiest congratulations, only blaming me for withholding my confidence so long, and sent me to college at once. I will not enter into the story of my disappointment and his. If ever man had good-will, I had; but it was not to be. I could never describe to you the feeling of terror with which I left that college, nor the almost nervous dread that haunted me of falling away from my will to serve God. After practising again in Dublin for some time, I entered the navy as surgeon,

and spent the greater part of the very quiet life I led there in reading the lives of missionary priests, and dreaming that I might even yet be one day called to follow their example. As I am not confessing my sins I need not tell you how much time I wasted ; but in the middle of these dreams an opportunity occurred of visiting Ballycross. To my intense sorrow I found my dear old father so broken down that I resolved never to leave him again, and sent in my resignation at once. It was not too soon, for he only lasted a few short months. But those few months opened my eyes. What holier higher path could I have desired than the life of usefulness in my early home that my father pointed out to me before he died ? Strange blindness of mortals, who often dream and long and even form plans of world-wide beneficence, and forget the simple home-duties that lie directly in their road, and in the performance of which, perhaps, is placed the one means of helping their neighbour, and sanctifying their own souls.'

By this time they had reached the gray stone steps, but before they ascended them the doctor paused for a moment, and turned to his companion.

'I am afraid, Miss Neville, that you will consider that a great deal of what I have been saying to-night is very egotistical. But I have spoken in all simplicity, and must trust to you not to mistake my meaning. It has required, believe me, no small effort on my part to intrude my own personal antecedents upon your notice. I have, however, had but one motive in doing so, and it has been this, that if you resolve, as God grant you may, on treading in your mother's footsteps with regard to your people, you may know that there is one person at least, and not

far distant, who is solemnly bound by his very conscience to help you in every plan you may propose for their benefit.'

'I quite understand you, Dr. O'Meara,' replied Maude very gently, 'and thank you very much. I sincerely trust that I may one day be able to show you that you have not spoken in vain.'

Mrs. Barton had been as good as her word; for notwithstanding the number to be provided for, and the very short time for preparation, her supper was a splendid success. As an ox had surrendered his life for the occasion, perhaps the meat was not quite as tender as it might have been. But what of that? The guests had come to enjoy themselves, and enjoy themselves they did with such good-will that we question very much whether, if slices of leather had been served up to them, with such rich gravy and such mealy potatoes, and, better than all, by such kindly hands, they would have found them tough.

For the information of our non-Catholic readers, we may say that though St. Patrick's-day, falling, as it does, in the middle of March, must always come in Lent, so many dispensations are given in our ungenial latitudes that it does not necessarily fall on an abstinence-day. As our good friend the doctor has already informed us, it did not do so on this occasion, and Miss Neville's friends could therefore eat, drink, and be merry without scruple. As to Maude herself, never before had she enjoyed anything so much; and she sped backwards and forwards, between her guests and the table at which Mr. Mills and Mrs. Barton stood carving, with platefuls of good cheer,

radiant with delight. Her cousins, the doctor, and even Mr. Neville and Professor Broadview were also turned for the nonce into waiters; and to Maude it was no small part of the entertainment to see the latter gentleman, spectacles on nose, wandering about with a plate in each hand in the hope of finding somebody still unserved to relieve him of them. Poor professor! that somebody never turned up, thanks to that wicked Harry, who always contrived to get the start of him; and had not Maude, out of sheer compassion, come at last to his rescue, the professor might have been wandering about, like Mynheer von Wodenblock, a spectre-vendor of cold roast beef till doomsday.

The elder people were brought in first, and when they had eaten as much as people who for many a long day had seen neither roast beef nor plum pudding would and could, they returned to the barn, where the doctor showed a magic lantern while the younger ones took their place at supper. When this was over, another hour's dancing was allowed, and at eleven the revels were at an end. Many of the women who had come from a distance remained in the barn, soon well strewn with straw, for the night, while some of the men took possession of another adjoining it. The rest took their departure; and although, as Mr. Neville had prognosticated from past experience, a few adjourned to a low public-house in the village, and kept it up till morning in a fashion more lively than edifying, the greater part, talking of their young lady all the way, went joyously to their homes, where, before they laid themselves down on their humble pallets, they prayed for a thousand blessings, broad and deep, on her and hers.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was the morning after the tenants' feast and Neville Court was very quiet, for after their unwonted exertions of the last two days every member of the household was glad of a little extra repose; and although the stable-clock had chimed seven the chimneys were still smokeless, and the doors and windows still closed and barred. Nor was it only inside the big house that the comfortable old god Morpheus was asserting his power. Not a single denizen of the two barns was yet stirring, while the very farmboys were making up for a night of unmitigated indigestion, although the concert of unfed pigs and poultry might have awakened the Seven Sleepers. Another hour crept on and the clock struck eight. Whether it was this, or whether the yells of the pigs and turkeys grew even more outrageous in their desperation, we cannot say; but suddenly a sign of life appeared in the form of an old woman, who opened one of the barn-doors and sleepily peered out at the clock. Five minutes later both barns were a scene of animation, while the servants, awakened by the bustle without, sprang from their beds and were dressed in no time. Very soon, as in the old nursery tale, everything began to get *en train*—‘the fires began to burn the sticks,’ and if the sticks didn’t proceed, in the orthodox fashion, to ‘beat the dogs,’ they did what was far less unkind and far more to the purpose, for they began to boil the kettles and to send forth from the chimney-tops pretty blue wreaths of smoke, that curled

upward into the morning sunshine and told the world that Neville Court was once more awake and stirring.

And so was its mistress ; and just as Mrs. Barton had sat down to a cup of tea, for once in her life somewhat in dishabille, that worthy lady was disturbed by a gentle knock at her door, followed by the apparition of no less a personage than Miss Neville herself. The fact was that, unlike the rest of her household, Maude had been dressed and reading from a very early hour. When the stir outside had begun, she had peeped through her window ; and seeing that her guests of last night were beginning to straggle off one by one, on their various ways, it had struck her that the remains of last night's feast could not be better employed than in cheering them on their respective journeys. She had hardly expressed a wish to that effect before the tempting cup of tea was abandoned untasted, and a few minutes after Maude and Mrs. Barton, accompanied by two servants bearing dishes of meat and baskets of bread, made their appearance at the barn-doors, where, we need hardly say, both dishes and baskets were emptied with the utmost celerity. The former, however, were, for the most part, only patronised by the Protestants of the party, for abstinence in all its rigours had once again set in for the Catholics. The greater portion refused even a piece of meat to carry home, and shook their heads and ate their bread with an honest heartiness that delighted Maude more than she could have expressed.

‘I have had a fire lighted for breakfast, ma’am, in my lady’s boudoir,’ said Mrs. Barton, as they reëntered the house. ‘Every place down-stairs looks so rough and cheerless, I thought you would be more comfortable up there.’

‘My mother’s boudoir!’ echoed Maude; ‘why, I have not even seen it yet.’

‘I know you have not, ma’am. The doctor wanted to take you in yesterday; but, Miss Maudie, darling, you must not be angry with me—I would not let him. We wanted you bright and cheerful for last night, and somehow I was afraid it might upset you; for one thing, because there is a lovely portrait of your mother hanging there, a portrait so like her that it is almost life itself. But I will take you there now; shall I?’

Maude needed no second invitation, but followed the old housekeeper up-stairs to a small white door, on the gallery, very beautifully painted with summer flowers and butterflies, and which, being opened by Mrs. Barton, admitted them into ‘my lady’s boudoir.’ It was a somewhat small but very elegant apartment; so elegant, indeed, that it had evidently been furnished by Sir Morcar for his bride, in the first flush of his happiness, without reference either to trouble or expense. So delicate were the gorgeous hangings, so web-like the texture of the lace draperies, so heavily gilded the cornices and furniture, that nothing short of the almost daily attention on the beloved spot by Mrs. Barton could possibly have saved them from decay. As it was, Time had not been altogether cheated of his due, for the gilding was tarnished in more places than one, and the carpet and hangings had faded from their original splendour, while the dainty lace was only held together by a network of almost equally dainty darns. But so carefully was the light tempered to hide the ravages and dents wrought by the old man’s sickle, so carefully was every fold of drapery arranged, that only a very close observer

could have noticed either one or the other. As to Maude, one object, and one object only, met her view, and that was her mother's portrait. The old housekeeper, having placed a chair for her mistress, withdrew, and for nearly half an hour Maude gazed on the lovely and speaking countenance before her, lost in a tumult of contending thoughts and emotions. At the end of that time the door opened very softly, and Mrs. Barton, now as neat and prim as a new pin, again presented herself. She had hoped that by this time Maude would have grown calm, and was not a little startled when the young girl threw herself into her arms, and with a passionate burst of tears, implored her to tell her all she could about her mother. It would have been difficult to have found a theme more welcome to the good old woman, who obeyed with sparkling eyes, beginning with the day when Lady Neville had first arrived among them, bright and blushing, as Sir Morcar's bride. Mrs. Barton was not, as Maude had imagined, an old Irish Catholic, but the daughter of an English farmer; a Methodist, who believed, and had moreover taught his children to believe, that everything connected with 'Romanism' must necessarily be bad. She described to Maude the deep distrust with which she had regarded the young bride, but soon went on to tell her how Lady Neville's gentleness had won her heart, and how, from loving her, she began gradually to think about her religion, then to study it, then to admire it, and finally to embrace it. At this point of her narrative Mrs. Barton rose from her seat, and signing to Maude to follow her, crossed the room towards a curtain the young girl had not hitherto remarked, and which, being drawn aside, revealed

an exquisite little altar, surmounted by a marble statue of the Virgin Mother. And then Mrs. Barton told her how Lady Neville had taught her her prayers at that very altar; and how from that time forward she had always joined her mistress in her morning devotions, and oftentimes at night; and how after her departure, and more than ever after her death, it had been the one happiness of her lonely life to creep into that quiet corner, so replete with holy memories, and pray for her who had passed away.

So much did the old housekeeper find to say, that it was not till ten o'clock resounded through the house that they moved from the position they had occupied during their conversation, and then it was only to move still nearer to the little altar, before which they knelt down spontaneously, side by side. At length Mrs. Barton rose, and taking some books that were lying on the altar, she placed them in Maude's hand, and walked quietly out of the room. They were books of Catholic devotion, bearing evident marks of long and frequent use, and Maude, on opening them, found her mother's name inscribed in each, in writing fast turning yellow with age. Convulsively the young girl pressed them to her lips and heart, hardly able to realise her happiness in possessing them, when a sound outside the room warned her that a servant was about to enter with the breakfast, and she replaced her treasures on the altar, drew back the curtain, and resumed her seat. The moment after Mills bustled in, smiling all over with the pleasure of unexpectedly encountering his young mistress; and Maude, as she stirred the fire into a blaze, and sat down before it to await the rest of the breakfast-party, looked round the room for the first time. It seemed, she

thought, to realise to her mind all that the boudoir of an idolised wife would be. As the soft firelight flickered and reflected itself in a hundred angles of the polished grate, in the broad mirrors, and among the silver and china of the breakfast-table, and as a soft perfume was wafted from the flowers with which the skilful hand of O'Keefe had adorned every corner where flowers would grow, it seemed impossible to connect such a spot with a form long since mouldering in the grave. The whole apartment, on the contrary, looked so redolent with life, that the form of her mother seemed to preside there from her picture once again, endowed with all the faculties of living, moving, breathing existence.

The breakfast-party only consisted of Maude, the two old gentlemen, and Harry; for Fanny, tired out with her unwonted exertions, and further incapacitated by a bad headache, had signified her intention of keeping her room till noon.

As soon as breakfast was over, Professor Broadview, who had promised to take the chair at a committee to be held at Dublin, prepared for his departure. Mr. Neville had already offered him the use of his carriage to drive to the station, but he now offered himself too, seeing that it was a lovely morning, and they should have plenty of time to take a certain ruin, or rather heap of stones, by the way, that had long been a standing puzzle to antiquarians. Harry obtained leave to accompany them on his pony, and the party soon started in high glee, leaving Maude to keep her own company and dream of her mother.

CHAPTER XV.

ALTHOUGH dreaming may be a very pleasant occupation for a winter twilight, it is not altogether in keeping with a bright March morning, when the still leafless trees and yellow daffodils are dancing in the brisk fresh breeze and merry sunshine. Dearly as Maude loved her mother's memory, before she had sat half an hour watching the picture, and weaving stories round every article in the room, she began to wish for something to do. She tried the magnificent piano that stood in a recess; but on that, at least, Time had worked his will, and the result was such a curious combination of discords that, with her teeth on edge, Maude closed the instrument in dismay. She next took another peep at the altar, and there the two books caught her eye. Angry with herself for not thinking of them before, she took possession of them, and returning to her seat began to turn over the pages.

As the Ritualists have seen good to embody large portions of the Catholic prayer-books into theirs, many of the devotions that would have puzzled and outraged an ordinary Protestant were already familiar to Maude. For nearly an hour she occupied herself in examining the first book she had opened, and was just proceeding to look into the second one, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Dr. O'Meara presented himself.

'I am afraid I am intruding, Miss Neville?' he exclaimed on seeing her alone, and he drew back as he spoke.

'Not at all, Dr. O'Meara. I am very pleased to see you. My uncle has gone to the station with Professor

Broadview, but he will be back almost directly, and I am expecting Fanny down every moment.'

'I have only called to inquire how you all are after last night's late hours and dissipations. So you have found your way here at last?' he added, looking round him, whilst a somewhat sad expression stole over his face.

'Yes, and not only into my dear mother's room, but into her books also—see;' and Maude held them up to him.

'How well I remember them both!' said the doctor, taking them gently from her hand. 'O Miss Neville, how often, as a boy, I have carried them to church for her! This one especially;' and he bowed his face almost down to the book he was examining, to hide the tears that in spite of his manhood gathered in his eyes. 'Poor dear Lady Neville!' he murmured.

'You seem to have loved her so much, and to remember her still so well,' said Maude musingly; 'and yet you must have been young when she left Neville Court.'

'I was fifteen; just the age at which impressions are most easily and deeply engraven on a boy's mind. But I had good reason to love her; for what your saintly mother was to me, a poor motherless boy, God only knows. Few ever knew her real worth; your uncle, for instance, loved her for her sweetness and goodness; but no man, unless a Catholic, could ever know her in the fairest, holiest aspects of her character.'

There was a long pause, broken at length by Maude.

'I have been a long time examining these books this morning,' she observed; 'and they have made me wonder whether, if my mother had lived, I should have been a Roman Catholic. Do you think I should?'

‘It is not a question of what you would have been, but of what you were, my dear Miss Neville. You were baptised a Catholic, and for five years knew no other religion.’

‘So I have heard; but I do not mean that, because a person’s religion is not what they are born to, but what they profess in after years. My father, as you know, was of the English Church, and would probably have interfered when I grew older. Do you think it would have grieved my mother very much if he had done so, provided that I had been piously trained in the principles of his Church?’

The question almost took away his breath, for at the very moment she spoke he was thinking of an old yellow letter lying in his strong-box at Killnew—a letter that, eighteen years ago, had solemnly bequeathed her as a charge to his father, and which he had discovered a few weeks since in the secret drawer of an old escritoire, and had accepted as a charge tacitly bequeathed to himself.

‘How little she imagines,’ thought he, ‘as she sits there in the pride of her wealth and beauty, how strangely her most sacred interests have been committed to my guardianship—to me, a man of whose very name it seems she had not even heard till yesterday! Shall I tell her of the letter?’ he asked himself. ‘Perhaps not yet. I will wait till I know her better.’

Meanwhile Maude waited for an answer to her question.

‘We must not suppose such a contingency as the one you have just imagined,’ he replied; ‘for Sir Morcar had given a solemn promise, even before his marriage, that

all your mother's children should be reared in her own religion.'

'And yet after all I am not a Roman Catholic,' said Maude musingly, 'though certainly still less am I a Protestant. I am not surprised that my dear mother should have had a feeling against the Church of England as it was in her days. She would have felt very differently could she have seen it as it is now—bright, beautiful, and renovated. She would, I think, have died very happily could she have foreseen that I was one day destined to believe every doctrine of her Church, and yet at the same time to belong to my father's, and so form as it were, long after they had passed away, a living bond of union between them.'

She glanced at the doctor, as she spoke, with a smile half sad, half triumphant; but there was no response, not even the shadow of a smile in answer to hers.

She was surprised at his indifference, but continued quietly, 'Perhaps you do not understand this movement in the Church of England. Let me explain it to you;' and in glowing words she painted the dream of modern Anglicanism, finishing her picture with the ideal union of the West and East. 'Now you did not know that this was my faith, did you?' she asked, in her earnest child-like manner. You have been looking upon me all this time as a cold narrow-minded Protestant, have you not?' Again her smile was unreturned; but this time the doctor answered her question.

'If you mean that I did not know you were a Ritualist, you are mistaken; for your cousins told me so yesterday morning. But forgive me if I say that for my own part I

should infinitely prefer that you should be an ordinary Protestant, for then you would have a better chance of being saved through "invincible ignorance," as the Church calls it. You see I speak candidly; but you have introduced the subject yourself, and it is one on which the laws of politeness must give place to those of truth. You just now spoke of yourself as a living bond, uniting the creeds of your parents once so conflicting. My dear Miss Neville, they are conflicting still, for one is true and the other false; and to talk of union between truth and error is to talk of union between the living and the dead. Look at your position as a Ritualist from a Catholic point of view, the point from which your mother would have regarded it, and what do you see? That although the system you profess—modern Anglicanism—teaches you to believe in the existence of a Church, your mother's religion taught her, and teaches still, that from that Church you are cut off root and branch. You belong to a system that teaches you to believe in seven Sacraments, five of which your mother's religion taught her, and teaches still, no one out of the one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church can ever hope to receive. You, Miss Neville, belong to a system that teaches you to believe in the sacramental Presence of Jesus Christ in the Anglican Church; your mother's religion taught her, and teaches still, that that Presence is not there, and that if, in your later years, you have ever entered it at all, it has been as a stranger—if by chance you may have visited a Catholic church. You, in fine, belong to a system that refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Pope of Rome, while your mother's religion taught her, and teaches still, that

he is the chosen Vicar of Jesus Christ, the supreme head of His Church on earth.

‘On what, then, would you raise this temple, in which Ritualists dream of uniting the “ends of the world”? What could its foundation be but “the baseless fabric of a vision”? What man in his senses who considers the subject could, after ten minutes’ sober thought, ever contemplate uniting any two of these contradictions? No, no, Miss Neville; look into the subject for yourself, and you will find that there is neither consistency, harmony, nor beauty in your dream; but that the monster you would create would be more disproportionate, more heterogeneous, more hideous to behold than any fabled chimera of antiquity. I must ask you to forgive me if I speak intemperately. Under any case it would be hard to hear from the lips of the proprietor of an estate numbering as many Catholics as yours the words, “I am not a Roman Catholic;” but from your mother’s child, from the lips of a child of the Church baptised into her bosom—for such at least you are—those words are more than I can bear. Alas for mixed marriages! God is my witness, I would compass heaven and earth to prevent one!’

He spoke passionately, but the next moment checked himself, and continued in a subdued voice:

‘Once more I am transgressing; but once more I say, forgive me. It is difficult to say no more than one ought and would upon a subject upon which one feels as deeply as I do upon this. Is it peace between us?’

‘Yes,’ said Maude; ‘for Peace is a goddess that ought not to quarrel with sincerity; and although you have tried hard to disenchant me, where disenchantment would be

a great source of sorrow to me, you have spoken, I feel, with a good intention, and I thank you very much.'

At that moment Mr. Neville entered the room, and a few minutes later the luncheon-bell resounded through the house. Of course the doctor was invited to remain, and told Harry so many comical stories of his schoolboy days that Maude soon forgot his attempts at disenchantment, while Fanny, in spite of her headache, could do nothing but laugh.

After luncheon there was a great deal of hurrying to and fro, packing and cording, and at four o'clock the old servants were again assembled in the hall to see their young mistress depart.

'But not for long,' whispered Maude, as she wrung the housekeeper's hand through the carriage-window; 'not for long, only a few months, and then—' The rest was lost in the roll of the wheels, though what she had heard was all-sufficient to send Mrs. Barton smiling back up the old gray steps. Then, of course, the great doors were once more shut and barred, and the window-shutters once more closed. And yet, somehow, the old house seemed no longer to look desolate and forlorn. 'Only a few months,' said O'Keefe's whistle, as he sauntered round it, and watched his gardeners lay out the fresh beds and re-gravel the drive. 'Not for long,' said glad voices in the servants'-hall, as they talked over the grand festivities that the doctor had planned, and promised them in the month of October, when Miss Neville would be of age. 'Not for long,' echoed the doctor, as in the village he encountered a certain bumptious ugly-looking man taking his way down its single street, and peering as he went

with hawk-like eyes into dilapidated cabins and desolate gardens,—‘not for long.’

CHAPTER XVI.

ALTHOUGH aunt Barbara always assured her friends that the resources she possessed in herself were such as to render her independent of society, there had been a very dreary look on her face when she had seen the carriage drive away without her on St. Patrick's-eve. Very dismal, too, was the evening she passed afterwards, all alone in the large rambling rooms; for Harry, by no means desirous of a *tête-à-tête* with his relative, disappeared with the rest, and spent the evening in Joseph's pantry, like the Czar Peter studying boat-building, though on a smaller scale than the imperial artisan. The next morning saw Miss Barbara seated to a solitary breakfast, more dull and doleful than she cared to confess, even to herself. Presently, to her great relief, the postman's ring was heard, and a smile stole over her countenance as its echoes resounded through the silent house, which deepened into a grin of satisfaction when a letter was laid before her in the handwriting of the Rev. David Giles. She opened it, and great was her delight when she read that the reverend gentleman purposed once again trespassing on his ‘kind friend and brother in the Lord, Mr. Neville, for a few days, and would arrive that day about noon.’

After a few minutes spent in quiet self-congratulation,

during which she munched her toast with a very happy twinkle in her hard gray eyes, aunt Barbara rang the bell, and desired that the housemaid might be sent to her. On the appearance of that individual in anything but the best of humours (for Miss Barbara was universally disliked among the servants) she ordered a fire to be lighted in the best bedroom, a very substantial luncheon to be prepared, with sundry other creature comforts for her visitor; and then, having hastily dressed herself, sallied forth to communicate the good tidings to one or two kindred spirits in the neighbourhood. As each and all were staunch admirers of Mr. Giles, it may well be imagined they had a great deal to say about him; and it was therefore nearly twelve o'clock when Miss Barbara paid the last of her intended calls at the house of an old maiden lady residing about a mile beyond Ballycross. It is not our intention to give *in extenso* the mutual felicitations of the two venerable spinsters over their unexpected happiness, nor to describe the avidity with which they looked forward to the 'sweet repast' they expected to make on the words of the coming divine. Suffice it to say, they discussed him corporally and spiritually, inside and out, from the crown of his dear head to the soles of his sweet feet. The very Scriptures were rifled to describe him. He had the 'eloquence of Paul,' the 'zeal of Peter,' the 'valour of Gideon.' His obesity was dignified as fine proportions, his vulgarity as wit, his pugnacity as enthusiasm and zeal. They gloried in the soundness of his views, extolled the power of his lungs, revelled in his antics, pitied his rheumatics. His very squint was irresistible, while as for his whiskers—what were they not?

So much, in fact, did they find to say about their 'dear brother,' that, when Miss Barbara looked at her watch, she found that he had certainly arrived meantime, and must be at that moment expecting her at the Glebe House, the object of just as much attention as the servants chose to show him. The thought gave wings to her feet, and cut short an adieu that would otherwise have languished as far as the garden-gate, and she sped home at a rate very different from her usual majestic carriage.

In about a quarter of an hour she reached the village (such being the dignified appellation given to a cluster of cabins, forming the nucleus of about a dozen others that straggled off in various directions), and was about to cross it when a confused clatter of voices, shouts, and blows from the other end broke upon her ear. Miss Barbara paused to listen; for though the Rev. David Giles without his luncheon was one thing, an unprotected female was another.

'What noise is that?' she asked of a woman who came flying up at the moment.

'Noise? Och, shure an' it's only a bit of a foight goin' on in the village, ma'am! There's shure to be plinty o' that sort o' thing on St. Pathrick's-day;' and Mrs. Flanagan bustled on, wiping the soapsuds from her arms as she went, and grinning as though she anticipated some fun.

'A fight!' echoed Miss Barbara; 'you surely do not mean to say—' But her informant was already far ahead. 'O, these dreadful Irishmen! What shall I do? I know I shall get killed if I try to pass them! And yet there's that poor, dear, patient lamb waiting for his luncheon. I know he will not begin without me—and

after his journey it's enough to kill him. What shall I do? Which way shall I go? Isn't there another road home?'

As nobody appeared to answer her questions she ceased proposing them, but stood in the middle of the road in an agony of uncertainty, occasionally taking a few steps forward as she thought of Mr. Giles, and retreating as many back whenever the uproar increased or seemed likely to come in her direction. She had remained in this state of perplexity for about a quarter of an hour when the head of a man suddenly peeped over a hedge hard by. Miss Barbara with a shriek was about to rush back along the road she had lately travelled, when, to her intense relief, she recognised the countenance of her neophyte, Tim Murphy.

'O Timothy! Timothy!' she cried, 'a fight, a fearful fight, is going on in the village, and I have nobody to protect me.'

'Purtect you, is it? Bedad, and I'll purtect you, or my name isn't Tim Murphy. Who's been assaultin' o' yiz?'

'No one as yet, Timothy; but listen to those cries and oaths and blows. Are they not fearful?'

Tim listened: 'Ah, tut, my leddy, and that's jist nothin' at all! It's nothin' in the world but a bit of a row amongst some young fellows as have just turned out o' Jim Rooney's, I'll be bound. They're dhrunk, my leddy, savin' yer presence, that's all. Ye've only got to keep on th' other side of the way, out o' raich of the shticks, and take no notice. Divil a bit 'ud they hurt the likes o' you, not they;' and as he spoke Tim took a bird's-eye survey of the contest from his vantage-ground.

‘And would you have me pass them, Timothy, alone and unprotected; for home I must go, dark as the danger is that threatens me? Would you have me pass through a mob of infuriated ruffians who would willingly burn me at a stake, hang me on a gibbet, torture me with thumb-screws, stretch me——? But what need is there of telling you all the horrors that those bloodthirsty Papists might perpetrate on me when you know them so well? And yet, in spite of all that I have done for you and yours, will you allow me to brave the peril unprotected? I am ashamed of you, Timothy!’

‘Well, you see, my leddy, it’s just this,’ said Tim, scrambling down from the hedge: ‘I’m afeard I shouldn’t be much purtection if I wint wid yiz. You see it’s St. Pathrick’s-day, God bl—. I ax yer pardon, my leddy,’ he added, almost choking himself with a word and a half he was obliged to swallow,—‘my chest’s gittin’ dhreadful bad again. But as I was saying, it’s St. Pathrick’s-day. Now you know, my leddy, as long as I was a—a—’

‘Heathen,’ suggested Miss Barbara, ‘a poor blind misguided heathen!’

‘Well, thin, as long as I was a haythen, I always fought on th’ other soid, you see, and, as you may think, my ould frinds is cross wid me above a bit.’

‘Cross with you, Timothy! Something more than that, my friend, I expect. But, then, what of that? You are only suffering a little persecution for righteousness’ sake. Even supposing every Papist in Ballycross was in a state of burning, raging, red-hot fury against you, think, Timothy, think how glorious that would be!’

‘Och, yes, my leddy. I know it’s very glorious, as you say; but thin, I’m sartin sure, if I went wid your leddyship jist now, I’d git my head broke, and thin, my leddy, what purtection ’ud I be? And thin, you see, Biddy was took awful bad as I come out, and it’s jist the doother I’m running for now, and thin—’

‘Well, well, Timothy, that will do, that will do,’ cried Miss Barbara, wringing her hands with impatience. ‘If you won’t go, you won’t; but there is no use in wasting time prating about it.’

‘Och, my leddy—’ began Tim.

‘Be silent, I tell you, and listen. Is there no man living about here you could get to go with me?’

‘There is,’ cried Tim; ‘shure, an’ isn’t there my brother? He lives in a cabin jist a bit higher up the road, and I’ll fetch him in a moment.’

‘But he’s a Romanist.’

‘Niver you fear, my leddy; he’ll tak as much care of yiz as if you wor gould and silver. He’ll purtect you, and jist won’t he be proud!’

Tim ran off at the top of his speed, only too glad to escape. To do him justice, however, we must fully acquit the poor ‘souper’ of cowardice. His Irish blood boiled and tingled in his veins as the uproar echoed along the road; and, renegade though he was, he longed to ‘sthrike a blow for the ould religion.’ For the last two or three days he had kept out of everybody’s way, for well he felt that he had no friends. And he was right. Those he had left behind openly execrated or ridiculed him, some even making the sign of the Cross when they passed him on the road, while his new brethren despised and mistrusted

him. How could they do otherwise, seeing that Tim had only changed his religion when he had lost his pigs—that he never maligned the faith nor abused the Pope, nor went to the Protestant church, except when bullied there or baited there by Miss Barbara?

As soon as Tim was fairly out of sight of his patroness he slackened his pace. Since his apostasy the intercourse of the brothers had been far from amiable, and as he approached Peter's cabin serious misgivings assailed his mind. Peter Murphy loved his brother with that deep fraternal affection that forms so conspicuous a landmark in the Irish character, and this affection had so increased his horror at Tim's degeneracy, that it had nearly broken his heart. In his anger he had sworn that until his brother again bent his knees before God's altar and before God's priest, 'he would niver spake him a civil word;' and he never did. For on no occasion, either in public or private, did he spare him; and so much did Tim dread Peter's stinging reproaches, that nothing short of the perplexity that Miss Barbara's request had placed him in would have induced him to encounter them of his own accord. Besides, notwithstanding the confidence he had expressed in Peter's willingness to assist Miss Barbara, in his own mind he had many doubts on the subject. Had either Miss Maude Neville or Miss Fanny required protection, Tim well knew that, so great was Peter's devotion to the family, he would have gone through fire and water in their service. But for Miss Barbara—she whom half the village regarded as an interloper and inquisitor, and against whom Peter especially had such good cause of resentment—that was quite another matter.

But why not give her the slip altogether? Happy thought! under the influence of which Tim scoured the first half of a potato-field. Suddenly, however, a vision of many favours in the past, and others in perspective, rose before him, and cut short his career. No, there was nothing for him but submission to his fate; and with unwilling feet poor Tim retraced his steps, and wended his way to his brother's cabin.

Peter was just saying grace over a dish of potatoes when Tim thrust his head in at the door, and no sooner was that pious exercise concluded than, just as the latter had expected, the storm burst.

'And what divil's errand brings you here, ye ould souper,' was Peter's salutation, 'turnin' yer frends sick with the sight o' yiz? Tim Murphy indeed! A purty Murphy you are! Why don't yer change yer name, and send it afther the ould religion? What's that ye're sayin' about St. Pathrick, God bless him? Faix, and I wondher ye're not ashamed to mintion his blissed name. Be off wid you, and tell Biddy to mind yer crazy ould roof doesn't fall down on yiz both to-day. It's my opinion it would, if it wasn't for your innocent childher.'

As he spoke, however, he pushed two of his own aside to make way for him at the table; for, as Tim expressed it, 'Peter's bark was worse than his bite,' and he was about the last man in the world to let his brother leave his cabin while a dish of potatoes smoked on the table. The mutterings and threatenings, however, still continued to fall so thick and fast, that, try as he would, it was some time before Tim could obtain a hearing.

At length, however, in a lull caused by a conflict be-

tween one of the children and the pig over a potato, Tim contrived to state his errand, though he wisely abstained from particulars, simply informing Peter that 'one of the ladies from the big house was axin' for him at the bottom of the lane.' Displeased though Peter was with the messenger, he could not fail to be gratified with the message, and having donned his hat, an article of attire less serviceable than picturesque, he started for the place indicated.

Whether Peter mistook the spot, or whether Miss Barbara had been too impatient to await his arrival, we know not. Nobody was there; and Peter, in a high state of wrath, was about to return to his interrupted dinner when his ear caught the sounds of strife in the distance. Immediately the lady, his potatoes, and Tim were all forgotten, and before five minutes were over he was in the thick of the fray.

How he fared history says not, except that when he returned home late at night both himself and his hat were considerably the worse for wear. Nor does it state how Miss Barbara reached home. Certain it is that she arrived at the Glebe House about three o'clock, very muddy, tired, and discomfited, and that she found her reverend visitor, who had kindly made himself quite at home during her absence, fast asleep after his luncheon in Mr. Neville's arm-chair, with the sherry beside him, and the newspaper over his knees.

Tim meantime remained behind, and discussed Peter's share of the potatoes. But he discussed other things too, for after the children had gone to school, Mary Murphy, his brother's poor little wife, talked to him so touchingly about the black sin he was committing, and begged him so

earnestly to come back to the 'ould way,' that Tim went home with an arrow in his heart. He tried to forget it; but it was of no use, for do what he might, it bothered him sadly, very much more than all Peter's bluster put together had done during the whole four months of his apostasy.

CHAPTER XVII.

IF Mr. Neville had been asked to give his idea of happiness, he would have answered 'Home;' and much as he had enjoyed the dinner-party at Neville Court and two days' almost uninterrupted chat with his old chum, the professor, it was with a sigh of relief that he entered his own hall-door and proceeded to hang his hat on his own peg. This last intention was, however, frustrated, seeing that the said peg was already occupied by a rough, round, plebeian-looking hat that stared in his face with the assurance of an upstart who feels himself quite at home. As the servants' friends were supposed to come to another door, the clergyman looked at the article with some surprise, but surmising that old Joseph had taken advantage of his absence to receive his visitors in style, he displaced the intruder with a smile and walked off to the drawing-room. But another surprise was in store for him there, in the form of a pair of legs clad in garments evidently very near relations to the hat, and which were stretched in the most comfortable manner possible across one side of the fireplace. The upper part of the form to which the legs belonged was shrouded by the *Times*; but

the newspaper being lowered at Mr. Neville's approach, there was revealed to his astonished gaze the fat, coarse, squab features of the Rev. David Giles, who was reclining in his own favourite chair, in his own favourite corner.

Great was Mr. Neville's annoyance; for if there was a person in the world he disliked and despised to a degree almost amounting to an antipathy, it was the inquisitive, sensuous, low-bred little man before him. The respect due to his aunt and the duties of hospitality, however, induced him to hide his vexation as much as he could; and with the best grace he could muster he received Miss Barbara's explanation of the unwelcome apparition, and welcomed Mr. Giles to his house for as long as he chose to stay. Still, notwithstanding Mr. Neville's endeavour to appear hospitable, such a very decided air of coldness and constraint pervaded every word he uttered that anybody but Mr. Giles would have perceived at once that he was an unwelcome visitor. Maude, who stood by, as much chagrined at the intrusion as the master of the house, fondly hoped that Mr. Giles would take umbrage at her uncle's manner; but if others have 'reckoned without their host,' she reckoned without their guest, who, on the contrary, expressed himself so delighted with the cordiality of his 'brother in the Lord,' that he said he should certainly make the Glebe House of Ballycross his head-quarters for the three weeks during which it was to be his privilege to preach the 'glorious cause' in the neighbourhood.

What this glorious cause was, nobody knew or cared to ask; though they did know and care very much that the social harmony of their meals and happy evenings

should be interrupted by the presence of this very offensive stranger. But the event proved better than they had imagined; for Mr. Giles, delighted at having secured bed and board on such easy terms, felt in no way inclined to jeopardise his good fortune by intruding unwelcome matters on his entertainers; and, though he groaned in spirit over their blindness of heart, he confined his conversation, and that in an undertone, to Miss Barbara, who, only too delighted to monopolise the 'dear man's' communication to herself, sat and looked like one in the seventh heaven.

With Saturday came a suggestion from Miss Barbara, that during Mr. Giles's stay at Ballycross he should take the duty on Sunday afternoon. Slightly influenced perhaps by the recollection that it would save him the preparation of that second sermon, always the greater task of the two, with his usual easiness Mr. Neville consented; and when on the third Sunday it was stipulated that a collection could conclude the services, he asked no questions but consented to that also. On each afternoon Mr. Neville had been present, and when on the two first Sundays the preacher hammered away at 'justification by faith alone' and 'assurance,' he had only shrugged his shoulders, for they were just the vapid, pointless, noisy orations he had expected from the man. When, however, the third sermon thundered over his head, and howling, raving, and gesticulating, Mr. Giles advocated the cause of the Irish Church Missions, always Mr. Neville's utter abomination, the poor man's emotions may be better imagined than described. Fortunately for all parties concerned, this sermon was the finale to the three weeks'

visitation the Glebe House had been called upon to endure. The very next morning Mr. Giles started for the railway station in his host's pony phaeton, but not before the bountiful hand of Miss Barbara had piled its vacant seat with several hampers of good cheer, the fruits of the rector's poultry-yard, dairy, and store-cupboards.

To console herself for his departure, aunt Barbara determined to pay a visit to their mutual *protégé* and favourite, that most hopeful of converts, Tim Murphy. But alas for human gratitude! Whatever the Athenians may have said about it, there was certainly no altar in its honour to be found in Tim Murphy's heart; for no sooner did that misguided individual catch sight of a very familiar bonnet coming in the direction of his cabin than he hastened to put two ploughed fields and three stone walls between himself and his domicile, thus ungallantly leaving Biddy 'to do the honours' to the visitor.

'Good-morning, Mrs. Murphy,' said Miss Barbara, entering so unceremoniously that Biddy had hardly time to thrust her short pipe out of sight.

'Good-mornin', my leddy,' said the latter, as she rose from the three-legged stool on which she had been industriously watching the boiling of the potatoes, and as she spoke she placed the only chair she possessed for the accommodation of her visitor, 'and good luck to yiz.'

'Poof! I smell smoke!' said Miss Barbara angrily; 'bless me, who has been smoking?'

'Ah, my leddy, sure an' it's the wind we had last week as has got into the chimley.'

'Chimney! Nonsense, it's tobacco-smoke I mean.'

'Ah, thin it's the pataties beginnin' to burn, I expect,'

said Biddy, walking to the fire and uncovering the pot with the utmost gravity. 'Ye'd never think, ma'am, how much burnt pataties smells like tabakky!'

'Stuff and nonsense, woman! Do you think I'm a fool?' cried Miss Barbara. 'Now I tell you what it is, Mrs. Murphy: I am not going to give money to have it puffed away in tobacco-smoke! Just please to tell Timothy that; and say that he must give up his pipe, or I shall not continue to visit him. Do you hear?'

'Yis, ma'am,' said Biddy, pushing her hand still further under her apron.

'What a heart the man must have,' continued Miss Barbara, 'to go on smoking after the calculation that the Rev. Mr. Giles read to him the other day out of his beautiful tract entitled "Tobacco or Timbuctoo," showing what the pence spent on that nasty stuff might do towards either the conversion of the heathen or of the Romanists of this benighted land! I'm quite ashamed of him, and mind you tell him so.'

'Yis, my leddy.'

'Of course, you both went yesterday afternoon to hear Mr. Giles, and took the children with you. I looked round the church, but I could not see you anywhere.'

'Bekase we were behind yiz, ma'am. To till you the thruth, I was for lavin' the childher; but nothin' 'ud sarve 'em but t' go and hear the gintleman, the darling cray-thurs!'

'And how did you like the sermon?' asked Miss Barbara, with a condescending smile.

'Ah, shure, and it was beautiful,' said Biddy enthusiastically. 'And sitch a voice as the gintleman has; why,

my leddy, ye could hear it from hear till the church, I'm thinking. Ah, it was a sarment!' And Biddy shook her head like an old connoisseur over his port.

'Well then, Mrs. Murphy,' said Miss Barbara solemnly, 'you can form some slight idea of what I have given up to labour among you. If you enjoyed that precious man so much, imagine what sweet repasts mine must have been when I sat under him altogether. Sometimes when I remember what I have lost, it seems more than I can bear, till I think of all the good I am doing here, and then, as he so sweetly says, "I grow resigned." Yes, week after week that torrent of eloquence used to pour forth to denounce the errors of Rome, reminding me of Alpine thunder, as it rolled over my head.'

'It's a wondher it didn't brake it, I'm shure,' said Bridget admiringly; and as the compliment was well intended, Miss Barbara smiled benignly.

'Nora is at school, of course,' she remarked, after making a tour of the apartment, during the course of which she had inspected the inner room, looked under the bed, investigated the contents of a cupboard, and peeped behind some plates and dishes on a shelf.

'Yis, ma'am,' said Biddy, casting, however, an uneasy glance towards the door as she spoke.

'I hope she attends regularly, and progresses well; if so, I will reward her at Christmas with a Testament.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Biddy, dropping a curtsy.

'It is rather a long way for her to walk every day,' continued Miss Barbara; 'for I suppose our school is more than two miles from here. She takes her dinner with her, I suppose?'

‘ Yis, ma’am.’

‘ Well, it is a long way, certainly ; but I trust the day will come when we shall see a Protestant school standing in the place of that Romanist one over there. But, after all, a little walk does children good ; and what a blessing it is for you, my friend, to have yours snatched from the ways of error, and reared among the lambs of Christ’s fold ! What a blessing to see them attend a place where they will be taught to worship God, instead of the Virgin Mary ! What a blessing, when you consider what you used to be, and what they would have been !’ And here Miss Barbara commenced a fancy sketch that might have served for a description of heathen parts as benighted as any in Timbuctoo. She was in the very middle of her subject when a bright dirty little face peeped in at the doorway, and, in spite of Biddy’s admonitory winks and nods, sidled in and took refuge by the maternal knee.

‘ I thought you told me that Nora had gone to school,’ exclaimed Miss Barbara, reining up her homily with a jerk.

‘ Ah, thin, it’s yer ladyship as is mistaken ; it’s aten up with the infleuenzy she is intirely,’ said Biddy.

‘ Influenza !’ cried Miss Barbara ; ‘ why, she looks the very picture of health. I am sadly afraid, Mrs. Murphy, that you continue to spoil your children, notwithstanding all the good advice you have received from me on the subject. Come here, Nora, and put out your tongue.’

The tone was not very inviting certainly, and Nora seemed to think so ; for she only clung more closely to her mother, as she darted looks of defiance at Miss Barbara from under her long lashes.

‘ Come here this instant, when I call you,’ exclaimed

that lady, raising her voice considerably above drawing-room pitch.

‘Go to the leddy, honey,’ said the mother coaxingly.

Not an inch would Nora stir; but still staring the visitor out of countenance, commenced sulkily sucking a string of blue beads that hung round her neck.

‘And this is the way you manage your children, is it, Mrs. Murphy?’ asked Miss Barbara, as she observed Biddy’s hand unconsciously caressing the tangled locks of her refractory daughter. ‘Well, I shall speak to her father about this behaviour, and see what he says to it. Why, you naughty child, how dare you refuse to come when I call you!’ and as she spoke she seized the chubby little arm, and roughly dragged the offender into the middle of the room, where, as might be expected, she began to howl dismally. ‘You naughty, wicked, good-for-nothing child, how dare you stay away from school! And what do you mean,’ she asked, turning to the mother, ‘by letting her wear that trumpery necklace? How often have I told you that it is by this early encouragement of the love of finery that mothers pave the way for the ruin of their daughters in after-life! Take it off, this instant, miss,’ she continued, making a lunge at the article in question.

‘O me bades, me bootiful bades! You sha’n’t have ’em, you sha’n’t!’ screamed Nora, resisting with all her might, and dancing with passion. In the scuffle the chain of the rosary—for such it was—snapped, and the little blue beads fell with a rattle to the ground. ‘O mother, she’s broke me bades intirely, she has; my illigant bades that grannie gave me, whin ye fitched me wid ye to Neville Town yisterday afternoon,’ cried the child, sobbing bitterly;

‘and jist as the taycher had got Father Donovan to bless ’em. O, what will I do—what will I do?’ and Nora wrung her little hands in childish grief.

If Nora had tried she could not have made a speech less *apropos* to the occasion, seeing that—as Biddy afterwards phrased it to her husband—‘she wint and let two cats out o’ the bag at wonst.’ It would be impossible to describe the glance of withering indignation with which Miss Barbara, relinquishing her hold of Nora, strode across the floor and confronted the mother.

‘Very well, Mrs. Murphy; so you went to Neville Town yesterday afternoon, did you? Then pray how could you have heard Mr. Giles’s sermon? And Nora goes to a school where the priest blesses beads, does she? I thought at the time how much truth there was in the story you trumped up about the influenza. Where’s your husband?’

‘Throth, my leddy, an’ that’s more than I can tell yiz,’ said Biddy, in utter dismay. Like her husband she had grown tired of the new way, and had quite countenanced the alteration he had seen proper to make with regard to the children’s school. Still she had hoped that their recalcitration might have been kept a secret from Miss Barbara, and had already been spending in imagination the *douceur* with which that lady’s visits to them generally terminated. No longer able to deny the fact, she tried whines, excuses, and lies of every possible shade of blackness and whiteness. But it was all to no purpose; for with the air of one whose confidence has been betrayed Miss Barbara swept out of the cabin, and took the road towards the Glebe House.

In the mean time Tim, fancying that he had seen

Miss Barbara depart about ten minutes before, was quietly sauntering homewards, still congratulating himself upon his escape, and greatly was he astounded when at a turn of the road he encountered her face to face. She immediately accused him with his recusancy, and after denials and equivocations innumerable Tim was compelled to acknowledge that he had been sending his children to the Catholic school, had not attended the Protestant church for three Sundays, nor had even heard Mr. Giles's sermon. For a few minutes the resolution he had made after his conversation with his sister-in-law held good, and he tried to tell her that he liked the ould faith better, but it was only for a few minutes. We will not enter into the details of the conversation that followed, characterised by shameless bribery on the one side, and cowardly yielding up of principle on the other, nor of the still more abominable bargain that concluded it. Suffice it to say that Miss Barbara went on her way rejoicing over a promise reëxtorted, and that Tim Murphy entered his cabin with a hang-dog look on his face, but the price of a new pig in his pocket, which he started off and purchased that very afternoon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE news of the arrival of Miss Neville at her uncle's house soon circled round the neighbourhood, and immediately every family of position within calling distance hastened to make her acquaintance. In Connaught morning calls are not the easy matters they are in London, seeing that it is less difficult to drive round a few squares than

over a few mountains. Still 'where there's a will there's a way,' and every day a fresh carriage or horse party rolled or cantered up the long silent drive; the house-bells pealed and the knockers rattaned; the servants put on the liveliness of old times; the very dogs woke up, and barked at the bustle. Then came dinner-parties, evening-parties, croquet-parties, given in honour of Miss Neville, besides all the other varieties of gaiety with which people in the country contrive to charm the monotony of their quiet lives. Though Mr. Neville kept as closely in his sanctum as he could, he was of course obliged to do something in return, and found himself at last sucked so deeply into this vortex of dissipation that he threatened to abscond altogether, and hide himself with the professor in a desert island. Not so Fanny; for although in the life of seclusion she had hitherto led the little maiden had declared over and over again that the world would never have charms for her, nobody seemed to enjoy this altered state of things more. Little by little a light stole into her eye and roses into her cheek; and her father, only too happy in her improved looks and spirits, would rub his hands in his glee, and ever and anon kissing Maude, would tell her that it was all like the waking up of the castle in the old nursery tale, and that she was the fairy prince who had worked the wonderful change.

Whether or not the alteration in Fanny was to be attributed to her cousin's influence, we cannot say; but certainly in a very short time she seemed to have been transformed from a timid sensitive girl into an earnest energetic little woman, and nobody felt the alteration more sensibly than aunt Barbara. For though that lady

still continued to hold the reins of government, the very domestics perceived that her real power had departed and that her throne was tottering. If she any longer had her own way, it was only on sufferance, and in things indifferent; for in every matter affecting the comfort of the household or the happiness of her father Fanny now insisted on having hers. Poor aunt Barbara! Little had she now to render life interesting; for Harry had gone to Harrow, and could no longer be scolded; Fanny had grown beyond her, and would no longer be ruled; the domestics had begun to look from her to the latter for orders; even the very cottagers were growing independent, and getting wills of their own. Justly or unjustly Miss Barbara traced all her troubles to Maude, and regarded her accordingly; and grew so tired at length of the altered state of affairs that she only waited for an opening in some other branch of the family, in which her talent for making people miserable might be turned to account, to take wing.

Much as Maude rejoiced in the renewed happiness of her uncle and cousins, she was not without her own secret little trials and worries. Who is? In London, nothing had been more wearisome to her high and generous spirit than the fulsome adulations of a crowd of fortune-hunters, who, measuring their attentions by the breadth of her estates, had successively pestered her for two whole seasons. She had fondly hoped that in leaving London society, she would leave them behind, and certainly none of them were hardy enough to follow her to Ireland; but she soon discovered that dandies, like dandelions, will flourish anywhere, and found men who, for their folly and

foppery, might have been duplicates of those she had left at the West-end, awaiting her in Connaught.

The festivities held in her honour were opened by a magnificent ball given by a Mrs. Spencer Wetherby, an old friend of her father's family. As Miss Barbara had refused to act as chaperone, Mrs. Wetherby had invited Maude and Fanny to spend two or three days at her house; and as on the evening of the ball the doctor had dined there, he had enjoyed a good half hour's *tête-à-tête* with his fair friends before the arrival of the guests. With those arrivals, however, began the presentations; and little by little the doctor was thrown into the background, where he sat in shadow, watching Maude as she flitted to and fro in the dances. She was apparently lost in the happiness of the moment, for she never once glanced, as he thought she would have done, at the corner where he sat. It is not a lively occupation for men who do not dance to sit and watch men who do, especially when the latter carry off the only women that the former think worth talking to in the room. After sitting an hour or two thus, O'Meara beat a retreat, and before half the evening was over, might have been found, with his pipe and whisky-toddy, comfortably stretching his legs before his own parlour-fire at Killnew. But comfortable as he looked, his were not altogether pleasant reflections; for in the smoke-wreaths that curled gracefully above his head, the doctor saw ugly faces, and those were the faces of four of Maude Neville's partners. Partly from personal intercourse, partly from report, he knew these four men well, and understood exactly the arts and blandishments each intended to bring into the field, in a desperate en-

deavour to win her and her patrimony. The one, a ruined and jaded nobleman, would he knew point to his coronet, long since sullied and defaced by the vice of its wearer, but none the less a coronet for all that. Another, a large landed proprietor, an elderly man, who had long had his eye on the Neville estate, would, he knew, whisper in gentle fatherly tones something about the advantage of joining lands already contiguous. A third, a profligate spendthrift of remarkably handsome person, would trust to his wealth of whisker to hide the poverty of his estate. While the fourth, the commanding officer of a regiment quartered in the neighbourhood, could only rely on his herculean proportions and the free-and-easy elegance that his impudence had enabled him to acquire, for success in an enterprise that could alone save him from exposure and ruin.

Such were the four worthies whom the doctor saw in the smoke, and who had that night entered the lists to compete for the fair white hand that held the title-deeds of Ballycross-cum-Neville Town. Yet what could he do? What command had he over Miss Neville's destiny? What right had he to shield or advise her? None, absolutely none. He must leave her, as her mother had left her, to Providence.

One thing, however, he could do, and did. He refused every one of the invitations that, during the few following weeks, poured in upon him, so thick and fast that he began to think Ballycross was going mad. 'Since I cannot hope to help or influence her under this ordeal, I will refrain from witnessing it,' he said, in a tragic whisper, so tragic that, we fear, if our readers had heard it they would

have looked round instinctively for a certain monster said to be green-eyed. But no monster was there ; or if he was, the doctor never saw him. For if, as he sat at home or circled round on his professional visits, ever brooding on the one subject, you had asked him why the rocks and quicksands that beset this particular woman should be a matter of such deep interest to him, he would have answered you, with all the frankness of his nature shining in his eyes, ' For her mother's sake !'

For fully a month the round of revelry lasted, as each family in the vicinity hospitably strove to outshine the rest in fêteing the heiress of Neville Court. Night after night saw Maude the admired of all admirers. Night after night saw her wearied and teased by some one of her four persecutors—sometimes by all four together. Suddenly the regiment was ordered back to England ; a circumstance that changed the captain's tactics, and forced him to the assault at once. What the lady's answer was on the occasion nobody ever knew, though his horse, perhaps, guessed it pretty well from the treatment he received all the way back to his master's quarters. A few days afterwards the exquisite came to the point also, and received a reply that sent him biting his lips out of the ballroom, to be seen no more. After this Maude had comparative peace ; though Lord —— and the squire still held their ground. The money and ingenuity expended by these two individuals, in their endeavours to outshine each other, almost equalled what they had just before lavished on an election, with this difference, however, in the ultimate result, that where their member had not been returned, their presents were ; and, deeply disgusted,

both hobbled away—the squire to console himself with his money-bags, and Lord —— to forget his chagrin in the excitement of the gambling-rooms of Paris.

Although the doctor had eschewed society for a month, he by no means contemplated turning anchorite altogether. Fortunately he possessed a friend in Mr. Frederic Donovan, a nephew of the parish priest, who had lately qualified for the medical profession, and who had come to stay with his uncle till he could hear of a practice likely to suit him. He was a gay sprightly young fellow, and kept the doctor well acquainted with the events of the day; and as soon as the latter heard that the coronet, the squire, the whiskers, and the matchless bow had been scattered to the four winds he accepted the invitation of a mutual friend, and when Maude least expected him, advanced to hand her to dinner.

She was much pleased; for not only had his sudden and protracted absence astonished her, but she very much regretted it from an interested motive. The very day after her return from Mrs. Wetherby's, Mr. Colquhoun had again presented himself at the Glebe House and asked to see her. After some persuasion she had at last persuaded her uncle to see him instead, and inform him that until Miss Neville attained her majority all business would be transacted, as usual, through himself. But though Maude thus extricated herself from a present dilemma, she knew that she had in no way obviated a future difficulty. She herself had thoroughly resolved on Colquhoun's dismissal; but as she could see that such a course would entirely derange all the plans her uncle was forming for the future, a thousand difficulties seemed to rise before her. It was no easy matter certainly to con-

template the sudden and unexpected dismissal of a man who had served her family for twenty years ; and with an anxiety almost bordering on nervousness, Maude had looked, day after day, for the one hand that she believed could assist her in her trouble.

As in Maude's transparent nature every emotion, as it rose to the surface, became visible at once, the doctor read the pleasure with which she met him in an instant. All his misgivings were gone in a moment ; her ordeal had left her as simple as it had found her ; and when, during dinner, amid the hum of conversation, she asked his advice on the subject of Colquhoun, his delight at the confidence reposed in him knew no bounds. He promised to draw her out a paper containing the various acts of injustice committed by Colquhoun during his administration of her affairs, and advised her to show it to her uncle, telling him whence she had procured it, and to insist that Colquhoun should explain each charge brought against him. Like the touch of the fairy's wand in the old story, his words seemed to resolve every difficulty at once ; and when Maude rose to follow the hostess to the drawing-room, she tripped up the broad grand staircase with a heart as light as a feather.

When the gentlemen joined the ladies, some little time afterwards, Maude was asked to sing ; and as the doctor turned over the pages while she sang, it was only natural that he should conduct her to her seat when the song was ended, and that, having conducted her thither, he should seat himself beside her. Now both Maude and the doctor had travelled and seen a great deal of society ; both were well read, both possessed of unusual conversa-

tional powers. There must have been, moreover, many an object of equal interest to them both lurking in the signs of the times. And yet, with a world-wide range of subjects before them, they chose that of the old times at Neville Court, and thence easily diverged from Lady Neville herself to the subject of her religion. It was a strange one to discuss in such a scene, where twenty voices were babbling of the opera, the stage, the latest fashions, and the last new novel. Yet never was voice more earnest than the doctor's, whose theme was the rights of the Holy See, nor face more serious than Maude's as she listened to him with the deepest attention. It was not till Mr. Neville's carriage was announced that the conversation ended, and even then, as they drove slowly home up and down the steep mountain-road, when her uncle and Fanny thought her asleep in her corner, Maude was silently retracing the burning and enthusiastic words she had just heard.

At last home was reached, and after two loving good-nights, Maude retired to her room. Her first proceeding on arriving there was to divest herself of her evening toilette and throw on a dressing-gown; her second, to open a handsome cabinet and take out her mother's books. She had placed them there on her return from Neville Court, intending to make them her daily study; but dismayed at the impression already made on her mind, in spite of herself, by the doctor's words, the morning after the tenants' feast, she had feared to open them again. This period of distrust had been succeeded by one of distraction, equally unpropitious to a search after truth; and had not her attention been a second time called

to the subject, much as the acquisition of the books had pleased her, they would probably have remained locked in the cabinet to her dying day. But it was not to be so; for not only did Maude take them from their hiding-place that night, but laying them reverently on the table, she knelt down beside it, and burying her face in her hands, prayed long and fervently. And what was her prayer? A simple childlike petition, to 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life,' for grace to seek Him for Himself alone, and not to suffer one thought of her mother's memory—dear as that memory was—to influence her in her search. Then seating herself, Maude quietly opened one of the books, and set herself with all the energy of her character to endeavour to solve Pilate's great question.

Nearly two hours passed before she lay down to rest; and even then hers was no peaceful slumber; for dream after dream, each more distorted than the last, passed before her mind, wearying and perplexing it. At length she grew calmer, and fancied that she was passing along a bright pleasant road, with the sun shining in a cloudless sky above her, the green trees arching over her head, and bright flowers enamelling the wayside banks. Several people seemed to be travelling with her, and yet the only forms she could distinctly distinguish were those of her uncle Edward and Mrs. Carew. Suddenly the scene changed. The trees, the flowers, the sunshine, disappeared; barrenness and desolation reigned around; and when she turned to seek her companions she found that all had departed and that she stood alone. With a terror that seemed almost to overwhelm her she advanced, but only to find herself on the brink of a fearful gulf that

yawned at her feet. She tried to retrace her steps, but in vain ; for she had already commenced the descent of the shelving bank, and an irresistible power seemed to impel her forward. In an agony she raised her eyes to the opposite side, and there saw her mother standing, no longer the cold creation of a painter's art, as she had beheld her in the boudoir, but warm, bright, and beautiful, with her arms outstretched towards her. Maude was about to rush to her embrace, unmindful of the yawning gulf between them, when a voice behind her implored her to desist. In her dream she seemed to turn, and there beheld the form of the Irish doctor beckoning her back with one hand, while with the other he pointed to a spot higher up the river than that on which she stood. Maude looked, and discovered a majestic bridge that, springing from bank to bank, spanned the gulf with seven broad arches, while the golden light that streamed over its bulwarks seemed to illumine the very depths of the black waters. Yet, wilful and distrustful even in her dream, Maude thought she turned from the bridge, and looking resolutely towards the spot where her mother still stood, strove once more to descend the bank unaided. In vain her mother seemed to warn her back, in vain the voice behind called her by her name. Resolutely she took the slippery path. Suddenly a stone on which she placed her foot seemed to dislodge with her weight, and crashing and thundering down the rocks, carried her with it into the abyss below ; and it was with a thrill of relief that Maude awaking found herself in her own room, and recognised Mrs. Watson's well-known knock at her door.

CHAPTER XIX.

SPRING had passed away, and the summer roses were beginning to bloom in the Neville Court gardens. And not only the roses, but many other bright and beautiful flowers besides; for O'Keefe's horticultural enterprises had surpassed even his own expectations, and Maude loved to tell him that she believed her garden was fast growing as beautiful as anything out of fairyland could possibly be. Altogether the old house, both within and without, began to look as if it were getting ready for its mistress; 'and such a mistress too!' as Mrs. Barton whispered to herself, as she arranged and re-arranged the new silk hangings of 'my lady's boudoir.'

For it had been decided by Mr. Neville, and certain other of Maude's more responsible relatives, that the young heiress should take up her residence at Neville Court in the month of October, immediately after her twenty-first birthday. Dearly would Maude have wished to have remained at the Glebe House, among the friends she loved so well; but '*Vox populi, vox Dei*,' said her uncle; and the young heiress, who understood how deeply her people longed to see her in the old place, and how much her actual residence at Neville Court would contribute to bring back into life and action the long-stagnated blood of her large inheritance, bowed her head in resignation. She had, however, raised it a few minutes afterwards to make one proviso, which was, that as she must have a chaperone, that chaperone should be Mrs. Carew. Only too pleased to give her pleasure, Mr. Neville, for once in his life, wrote a letter without delay, and received

an answer from Mrs. Carew almost by return of post, joyfully consenting to give up her own house in town and reside at Neville Court with her own dear child in the double capacity of friend and protectress, or as Maude loved to say, summing the two sweet offices in one—as mother.

Meanwhile a terrific storm had burst, raged, and been dispersed in Ballycross. The doctor, as he had promised Maude, had prepared the document regarding Colquhoun, and, just as he had expected, the latter, having no explanations to offer, had had recourse to recrimination and invectives against the author of the inquiry. It argued no little for the doctor's prudence that he had left no point unguarded, nor used any word of opprobrium or harshness towards his adversary. On the contrary, he had tempered every expression he had used in stating the bare truths with the most perfect Christian charity. At first Colquhoun had seemed inclined to 'fight it out,' for the trustees sided with him; but he soon changed his mind, and wrote them instead a letter of injured innocence throwing up his office at the summer quarter. Perhaps it suddenly struck him that his triumph, if gained, would only last till October; perhaps, that under the new *régime* the agency would no longer be worth having.

Meanwhile, too, the 'search after truth' continued; and morning after morning, and night after night, Maude read, prayed, and pondered over her little books. No one suspected her, not even Fanny, or, what was perhaps still stranger, not even the doctor. After Colquhoun's resignation he had, at Mr. Neville's earnest request, been commissioned by the trustees to choose a new agent for the estate, and business connected with this brought him

almost every day to the Glebe House. But although, in discussing the suitability of various applicants for the office, religion was often brought upon the *tapis*, so jealously did Maude guard her secret that, much as he had desired to interest her in the subject, he never for a moment suspected that he had succeeded in doing so except as a passing thought. Once, indeed, when he complained of Miss Barbara's interference with Tim, her lip certainly quivered, but only with the same amount of indignation that any act of meanness or bigotry would have elicited. Again, when he spoke of Father Donovan's untiring zeal and devotion, tears stood in her eyes, but just such tears he remembered had stood there on St. Patrick's-day, when he had drawn a picture that had thrown Father Donovan and her uncle into contrast, and so they told no tales.

It was, perhaps, an unwise course on Maude's part thus to reject the one kindly hand that longed to point the way, the one kindly voice that could so ably have explained away the doubts and difficulties that thronged her path. But from the very beginning Maude had resolved that no human voice or intellect should influence her judgment or bias her will ; and, difficult though at times her resolution was to keep, she kept it to the end. She, however, by no means intended it to last for ever. On the contrary, she fully determined that if in the end she found herself called to the Catholic Church, she would then confide her secret to the doctor, and ask him to advise her how to proceed next. For Maude had firmly resolved not to make Father Donovan the instrument of her reconciliation to the Church, much as his kindness and gentleness had won

her heart the very first time she had met him. The one bright spot in the misery around her seemed to be the kindly relations that existed between her uncle and the parish priest, and for the sake of her people she dared not run the risk of breaking them. No, if the day of conviction should ever arrive, Dr. O'Meara must be her friend in need. Who shall say what the thought of that strong heart and stalwart arm was to the lonely girl, when, at the end of a few weeks, the scales began to fall from her eyes, little by little, till hardly a doubt remained?—what, as she sat and trembled at the tempest drawing near, the tempest that could not fail to burst upon her when the truth should be known. The terrible indignation of her father's family, each member of which had written to her in turns, proudly exhorting her to maintain the honour and dignity of their name; the estrangement from her uncle and his family, which she felt sure would follow; and, greatest sorrow of all, perhaps, to her orphan heart, the disappointment of Mrs. Carew, who would probably refuse to come to her when she should hear of the step she had taken. For Maude well knew that, like many other Ritualists, that lady regarded a seceder to the 'Roman Church' with undisguised contempt.

One evening, just as the struggle in the mind of our heroine had arrived at the crisis, the two cousins might have been seen seated together in the drawing-room of the parsonage, enjoying a confidential chat. It was lovely weather, and the soft fresh breeze, as it stole in through the open French window, was richly laden with the perfume of fresh-cut hay and summer flowers, very refreshing to a weary mind and fevered brow. Maude was suffering

from both ; for it had been a sultry day, and the morning had been spent in deep and anxious study in her own room, and the afternoon in a long and tedious consultation with the new agent and Mr. Neville, which consultation had not been altogether either pleasant or satisfactory to her. For she had deemed it her duty resolutely to press a plan of her own (or rather a plan that she had adopted as her own) upon her uncle, concerning certain cottages on her property—a plan he wished as resolutely to evade, seeing that it would involve a certain amount of trouble to himself, though he grounded his objections on the score of expense to the estate. The young heiress had combated his arguments with considerable patience and ingenuity ; for though she had never herself even seen the cabins in question, the doctor had told her they were unfit for human habitations, and Maude was as resolute as a woman could be that they should be repaired, or even, if necessary, rebuilt. Of course as a woman always does (and ought to do in a right cause), Maude carried her point, and the clergyman with a sigh was obliged to promise to ride round and inspect the said cabins.

But this little worry was over now, and tired though she was, Maude laughed merrily as she described it all to Fanny, who, naughty child, was highly delighted at her cousin's persistency. Then they talked of other matters, very interesting to themselves, however void of head or tail they might have appeared to be to anyone not understanding the ins and outs of the warm young hearts and fresh young minds that discussed them. They were in the full tide of chatter when the door suddenly opened, and aunt Barbara stalked in. It was by no means a pleasant intrusion ; but

Fanny rose with a kindly smile, and placed a chair for her in her usual corner, while Maude arranged the blinds to exclude the sunbeams that straggled in upon her eyes. Then having seated themselves once more, with a comical look of disappointment upon their faces, they commenced a somewhat stiff and formal conversation upon things in general. In this Miss Barbara took no part, but knitted on with contracted brow and compressed lips, as though that stocking had been the end of her existence.

‘My dear Fanny,’ exclaimed Maude, suddenly breaking off in the middle of an observation on her wool-work, ‘see some one has broken the beautiful plant O’Keefe sent us yesterday morning.’

‘Ah, Maudie,’ said her cousin, shaking her head, ‘I have been expecting you to discover it all the evening. I I am so sorry, but it could not be helped. Bat did it with his tail this afternoon.’

‘Bat!’ cried Maude, with a look of deep interest, and seeming quite to forget her flower, ‘I did not know he had been here.’

‘Yes, he has, and his master too. The doctor called while you were closeted in the library with papa and Mr. Reynolds; but I should have thought you might have heard Bat barking at Looloo, for they were playing together when Bat broke the plant.’

So she would at another time, for Maude somehow had the faculty of distinguishing Bat’s bark among other canine voices; but at the particular moment to which Fanny referred, she had been too earnestly occupied in trying to get her own way to notice it.

‘Dr. O’Meara came to see both papa and yourself on

business ; but I told him you were engaged just then, and asked him to stay to dinner and have a chat with you afterwards. He had only just accepted my invitation, when word was brought to him that Tim Murphy had met with a severe accident, and was indeed, they feared, bleeding to death.'

'How dreadful!' cried Maude, shuddering.

'Tim Murphy!' cried Miss Barbara, starting up from her chair; 'and, pray, why was not I informed of this, when you every one of you know the interest I take in the man?'

'I really did not know that you had not been told, dear aunt, for all the servants knew of it,' replied Fanny quietly. 'As for myself I was too busy at the time, getting lint and old linen ready for the doctor to take with him, to think of anything else; and from that time till dinner I was writing letters for papa and making up his accounts, so that—'

'Well, really,' exclaimed Miss Barbara, raising her eyes to the ceiling, 'the lukewarmness of this family is most astonishing! And, pray, when you heard that Tim might bleed to death, what care did you take for his immortal soul?'

'I asked the doctor about him,' said Fanny quietly; 'and he told me he was a Catholic, so I knew he would be cared for. For Catholics are never careless when there is danger of death.'

'A Catholic!' shrieked Miss Barbara; 'then let me tell you he is nothing of the sort; and that infamous man, that Jesuit in disguise, that Dr. O'Meara, knows it as well as I do! But it is just what I should have expected,

for the bare-faced lies of those Papists surpass everything. A Catholic, is he? Just imagine the impudence of the man, when he knows that Timothy is one of my converts!’

Serious as was the subject, there was something so ludicrous in the rage of Aunt Barbara, that Fanny could not forbear a smile. Not so her cousin, who sat and looked at Miss Barbara in speechless indignation.

‘Well, how you can consider your conduct consistent as the daughter of a Protestant pastor puzzles me,’ continued Miss Barbara apostrophising Fanny with fierce solemnity. ‘Fine consistency certainly, when you deliberately allow a Romanist to send a Romish priest to snatch the lambs out of your father’s fold. I am ashamed of you, that I am! As for you, Miss Maude,’ she continued, turning to her as she spoke, ‘if you think to overwhelm me, by sitting and staring at me like a tragedy queen, you are quite mistaken. Nothing that you may think or say on the subject will surprise me, for everybody knows on which side your sympathies are enlisted, poor girl! I have little doubt,’ she added, in a tone of bitter irony, ‘that if you had heard of the accident at the time, you would have gone for the priest yourself.’

‘Yes,’ said Maude, restraining herself with a great effort, and speaking very quietly, ‘I would have gone—that is, if I could have found no other messenger; and deeply, moreover, should I have rejoiced at seeing a man reconciled to the God he had so fearfully insulted by first selling, as he did, his birthright for a little food, and afterwards consenting to stifle his conscience for the value of a pig! Yes,’ she continued, as though partly speaking to her own heart, ‘I would have fetched the priest!’

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But, indeed, you must not think another word about Barbara,' said Fanny, who mistook the cause of the ysm; 'for as for her other wicked innuendo, we all it is perfectly untrue. Be assured that we all under- both you and the doctor thoroughly; nobody appre- more than papa his disinterestedness in labour- as he does, among the people, nor your anxiety to him. As for me, I sometimes think that, seeing all as done for you, you are hardly kind enough to him. very sure if you were one iota less civil than you are would be positively ungrateful. So, you see, I, at am not likely to suspect you of any particular attach- to the doctor.' And as she spoke she once more and Maude in a long and loving embrace. It was well did so; for thus it was that the flush that suddenly fused her cousin's face remained unnoticed, and, all conscious of Maude's emotion, Fanny kissed her again and again, whispering, as she did so, words of consol- on, and softly preaching patience and forbearance even ith aunt Barbara.

CHAPTER XX.

THE few words that Mary Murphy had spoken to her her-in-law on St. Patrick's-day had made a far deeper session on his mind than she herself had dared to Her astonishment, therefore, was almost as great delight when she heard from her children a few ter that little Norah and her brother had gain made their appearance at the C ew to her husband with the tidings, :

‘Did I not say so?’ cried Miss Barbara, with a mocking laugh; ‘am I not right? And would not anybody else have said so who had seen you lately? It is not very difficult to guess why you have gone from the Ritualists to the Romanists. Well, I am sure somebody ought to be flattered, for it is not every heiress that would pick him up with a pair of tongs!’ and aunt Barbara swept out of the room.

Not a word was spoken for some few moments after her departure, but the young girls sat and looked at each other in silent astonishment. At length Fanny broke into an incontrollable fit of laughter, which was the immediate signal for Maude to burst into tears.

‘Maudie, my darling,’ cried her cousin, springing from her seat, ‘I beg of you not to grieve. What does it signify, what can it signify, whatever a bigoted woman like aunt Barbara chooses to say?’

A warm pressure of the hand was the only response.

‘Of course, dear,’ continued Fanny, ‘we are all sorry that you are a Ritualist; but even so, what business has aunt Barbara to interfere with your conscience? It only shows us how true it is that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread;” for ever since the day you spoke of it, papa has wished to talk to you upon the subject, but would not do so until you first consulted him, because he considered it a matter between God and yourself. For, after all, you still belong to the Church of England. It would be very different if you were really a Roman Catholic. I do not suppose you would find papa quite so easy then. That would indeed be a grief to us all.’

Maude buried her face in the cushions.

‘But, indeed, you must not think another word about aunt Barbara,’ said Fanny, who mistook the cause of the paroxysm; ‘for as for her other wicked innuendo, we all know it is perfectly untrue. Be assured that we all understand both you and the doctor thoroughly; nobody appreciates more than papa his disinterestedness in labouring, as he does, among the people, nor your anxiety to help him. As for me, I sometimes think that, seeing all he has done for you, you are hardly kind enough to him. I am very sure if you were one iota less civil than you are you would be positively ungrateful. So, you see, I, at least, am not likely to suspect you of any particular attachment to the doctor.’ And as she spoke she once more folded Maude in a long and loving embrace. It was well she did so; for thus it was that the flush that suddenly suffused her cousin’s face remained unnoticed, and, all unconscious of Maude’s emotion, Fanny kissed her again and again, whispering, as she did so, words of consolation, and softly preaching patience and forbearance even with aunt Barbara.

CHAPTER XX.

THE few words that Mary Murphy had spoken to her brother-in-law on St. Patrick’s-day had made a far deeper impression on his mind than she herself had dared to hope. Her astonishment, therefore, was almost as great as her delight when she heard from her children a few days after that little Norah and her brother Mike had once again made their appearance at the Catholic school. She flew to her husband with the tidings, and during the

next few days many a fervent thanksgiving arose from that little cabin and from a small field hard by, where Peter earned the daily bread for his family by the sweat of his brow. Still little was said by either the husband or wife to the neighbours around them on the subject; for Peter was far too cautious to seem to take too much for granted with regard to Tim's amendment. No mediciner ever dreaded a partial cure and relapse for a patient's body more than Peter dreaded such a calamity for his brother's soul; and when a pious old woman dilated on one or two little circumstances she had observed as hopeful signs in Tim's family of better things, Peter's only reply was to break out into invectives, as bitter as ever, against 'the thraiter and souper, who had haped sitch black disgrace upon his friends.' But deep down in his own heart Peter believed in and rejoiced over his brother's sincerity far more than he cared to own. And to a certain extent he only did him justice; for Mary's words had awakened in Tim's heart such a horror of himself, as she had portrayed him, 'God's inemy and the murderer of his childher's sowls,' that he had resolved, there and then, to return to his ancient faith. Alas, poor Tim! he had as yet to learn that something more than a mere human resolution, however strong it may be, is needed in the hour of temptation. That hour had come sooner than he had expected, and having no higher power to rely on than his own weak will, he had fallen; 'and the last state of that man had been worse than the first.'

Who shall paint the feeling of sickening disappointment with which Peter heard that Tim's children had been once more sent to the Protestant school, and that he

and his wife were again to be seen at the Protestant church? The blow was almost more than he could bear, coming, as it did, in the very face of the hope he had been so fondly, though secretly, nourishing. Only the consolation of his religion sustained him in his affliction. Not those who knew him best—not even Mary herself—understood all that he suffered; for Peter, always quiet, now grew taciturn in his grief, and seemed to repel all efforts at consolation. From the moment that the news of Tim's second defection was brought to him he sternly forbade his very name to be uttered in his presence, and often walked many a mile out of his way, rather than pass his cabin and run the risk of encountering him. Tim, on his part, as may be well believed, took equal precautions; and consequently, for the last two months, although their cabins were within five minutes' walk of each other, the brothers had never met.

Peter was therefore considerably astonished, one afternoon about the middle of June, to see his brother's eldest boy, Mike, run towards his cabin as fast as his legs would carry him, crying bitterly.

'What's the matther, Mickey, my lad?' asked Mary kindly, as the boy threw open the wicket.

'Ochone! and it's daddy that's kilt intoirely, and mammy tould me to till yiz to come quick, or it will be all over wid him!'

For an instant Peter paused, and with a face pale as ashes turned irresolutely to his wife. Should he go? An unwonted glance of reproof in those gentle eyes was more than answer to the unspoken question; and with a cry, half groan, half sob, Peter rushed out of the house.

For a few minutes Mary tried to quiet the lad, that she might learn the extent of the misfortune. Finding, however, that Mike refused to be comforted, she left him with his little cousins, who had clustered round him in dismay, and followed her husband to Tim's cabin.

She found Tim lying on his bed, bleeding profusely from a wound he had accidentally inflicted on his foot with a hatchet. It was well she arrived when she did; five minutes later and Tim would have bled to death. For Biddy, with loud lamentations, could only rush hither and thither, wringing her hands in an agony of terror; while Peter, and two of the neighbours, with the best intentions in the world, were only wasting time in trying to staunch the blood. Mary saw how matters stood in a minute, and gently pushing the assistants aside, she wrenched a string from her apron, and with her strong hand bound the leg tightly round, a little above the cut; then wrapping the apron over the wound itself, she sat down on the bed, pressing her fingers on the spot, to await the arrival of the doctor.

They would have formed a striking picture as they waited for nearly an hour round the blood-stained bed, the frantic wife, the wailing children, the anxious bystanders, the terrified sufferer. For, to Tim's excited imagination, his life was fast ebbing with his strength; and as he lay back on his pillow sick and faint with loss of blood, a terrible vision of judgment rose before him. Once or twice he turned to speak; but Mary implored him so earnestly to be silent as his only chance, that he obeyed, and once more lying back closed his eyes, to wait for the doctor. Still his lips moved, and more than once Mary

Murphy could distinctly hear the whispered words, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us,' and joined in them from the bottom of her heart.

At length the firm and long-desired footfall was heard without, and the moment after the face of Dr. O'Meara appeared at the door. The room was quickly cleared of all superfluous assistants, the children silenced, and even Biddy told 'to cease her bewailings and make herself useful, or make herself scarce.' To Peter's delight, as the doctor bound and dressed the wound he highly applauded Mary on her presence of mind and surgical skill. But even the doctor's presence was insufficient to reassure Tim. Irishman-like, he was certain he was going to die, and his countenance, as he watched the operations of the doctor, was rueful in the extreme. At last all was finished, the leg tightly bound, restoratives administered to the patient, and Dr. O'Meara prepared to depart. He was just reaching his hat for the purpose, when a groan from the bed recalled him.

'Dochter dear, shure, an' do you think I'm goin' to die?'

Now with the exception of a little physical pain, and a slight exhaustion from the bleeding, Tim never was better in his life; but as he asked the question an idea, serio-comic, like himself, entered the mind of the doctor, and he remained silent, looking very grave. Mary was at that instant in the outer room with Biddy, making a cup of tea for the patient; therefore Peter alone heard the question, and like Tim, he looked up into the doctor's face with a creeping feeling of apprehension when he found that the answer was delayed.

At length, in an agonised voice, Tim repeated his question.

‘Well, my friend,’ said the doctor, shaking his head, ‘wounds are serious matters sometimes, and many a man has died of one before now. I hope you will get on well; but if you were a rich man, for instance, I should advise you to make your will, and in any case, whether rich or poor, I should think no man would go and chop his foot half off till he had settled the affairs of his soul.’

‘O my sowl! is it my sowl you’re spakin’ about?’ cried Tim, as he clasped his hands and once more fell back on the bed, when if ever any one ‘roared in the disquietude of his heart,’ he did. The doctor took advantage of his perturbation to beckon Peter aside, and whisper a few words to him, after which he once more approached the bed, looking very serious. Peter meanwhile hurried out of the room to Mary, and in his turn whispered something to her, with a twinkle in his eye that had not shone there for many a long day.

‘Well, good-bye, Tim; I must be going now. I will look in and see you to-morrow;’ and the doctor held out his hand.

‘Is it goin’ that you are? Ah, docther dear, shure, an’ ye’ll never have the heart to lave me here to die like a dog! For, O docther, if I die, where will I go—where will I go? O, for the love of Heaven don’t go till ye see the priest o’ God darken that blessed door there!’

‘Priest!’ cried the doctor, in well-feigned astonishment. ‘Nonsense, man, you must be dreaming, or going off your head! What have you to do with the priest, or what has he to do with you? You gave up everything of

that kind and turned Protestant long ago, don't you remember? It's the minister you mean, Mr. Neville; you had better send Mike to fetch him.'

'Divil a foot shall he stir on sitch an arrand!' cried Tim, once more starting up. 'No, no, no; it's the priest I want; Father Donovan, God bless him! O, ax him to come, for the love of God; ax him to come, and let me confess my sins, and save my sowl! O Pether, Pether!'

Peter, whose confidence in the doctor was unbounded, had fully intended keeping out of the way, and leaving him to manage Tim in his own fashion; but his brother's cry was so heartrending that he found it impossible to resist it, and he responded by once more blundering into the room, where he stood with his eyes and mouth wide open, wondering what he ought to do next. Of course his appearance was the signal for renewed entreaties and protestations on the part of Tim, to all of which, however, he soon saw from the doctor's face, he was to turn a deaf ear; and never did man act a part better than Peter. He expressed the utmost contempt for Tim's self-accusations, perfect incredulity as to his promises of amendment, while with regard to his request for a priest Tim was told to 'hould his tongue, and not to dare to mintion the gintleman's name with his dirty mouth.' At length the doctor began to fear the effect of the excitement on his patient's nerves, and having made a sign to Peter to leave the room, he crossed over to the bed, and taking Tim's rough black hand in his, looked into his face with one of his brightest smiles, and told him the honest truth. So great was poor Tim's astonishment, that it was some little time before he could be made to understand the full meaning of the doc-

tor's words; but when he did comprehend them, and saw himself suddenly brought, as it were, out of the very shadow of death, it would hardly be a mistake to affirm that this was the very happiest moment of his life. When he had grown calm the doctor told him that he trusted he had yet many days to live, and that God would give him grace to spend them all to His service. He was still holding Tim's hand in his, and was just turning round to say a few kind words to Biddy, who had entered the room, and was standing by Peter's wife at the foot of the bed, when a quick footstep was heard to traverse the outer room, and the next moment the tall gaunt form of Miss Barbara stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE effect produced upon Tim Murphy and his friends by the sudden apparition of Miss Barbara may be better imagined than described. Even the doctor was so taken aback that he allowed some few seconds to elapse before he rose to receive her, or offer her his chair. But even when he had sufficiently recovered himself to do both, his politeness was unnoticed, for Miss Barbara strode past him, and in spite of Peter, who attempted to obstruct her progress by standing in her way, marched straight to the bed. No sooner, however, did the patient catch sight of her sharp features at his elbow than he covered his face with his hands, as though to exclude some unwelcome or repugnant object, and groaned aloud. It is hardly

to be supposed that such a reception on the part of her favourite could have been altogether gratifying to Miss Barbara; but whatever her feelings on the subject may have been, she contrived to control them.

‘Well, Timothy, and how are you?’ she inquired, seating herself majestically in the chair the doctor had just vacated, and drawing it to the bed. ‘Miss Fanny told me you had met with a severe accident, so I thought I would call round and see you, notwithstanding the heat and the inconvenience of disarranging my plans for the evening. But you look all right. What is the matter with you? And pray how did you do it?’

As Tim made no sign of replying, the doctor answered for him, and having explained the accident, concluded by telling her that Tim was progressing very favourably, and needed nothing but a little rest and quiet.

‘Then it has been nothing serious after all,’ exclaimed Miss Barbara. ‘How very stupid of my niece to be sure! She spoke as if something very frightful had occurred; indeed, she gave me to understand Timothy was bleeding to death. It is a strange thing that young people are so given to exaggeration!’

‘But Miss Fanny was right in what she told you at the time,’ said the doctor; ‘for had it not been for the prompt assistance rendered him by his sister-in-law, Tim must have died from exhaustion; for an artery has, I find, been seriously injured, and although I came the instant I heard of the accident, I could not have arrived in time to save him. Tim undoubtedly owes his life to Mary Murphy.’

‘And may the Lord of Heaven be praised, as put it

in her head to tie up my leg!' cried Tim, suddenly removing his hands from his face, and clasping them fervently together; 'and so to save my life, and lave me here a bit longer to work for Biddy and the poor childher. But, O Mary, my jewel! ye saved more than that; for by the blessin' o' God ye've saved my sowl, jist as it was goin' to fall down into the blackest pit o' hell along wi' them ugly divils!'

'Timothy!' cried Miss Barbara, 'I am astonished at you! You, a saved soul! You, one of the Lord's own flock! You, who told me only yesterday, in answer to my questions on the subject, that you felt in yourself the assurance of your election! You, who—'

'Whisht, my leddy, whisht!' cried Tim, waving his hand to silence her; 'I've had enough of that in the last twelve months to last me all my life an' more, and I'm goin' back to the ould way. Yes, my leddy; and I'd go back to it if I had to go all the way from here to Dublin on my bended knees, by way of penance for my sin in ever lavin' it! You may tak' the pig, my leddy, and welcome; but I mane it; and what's more, ye may tak' every bit and scrap that's left of what ye ever gave me; but I mane it all the same; and what's more still, if ye till me that ye'll never give us a morsel to ate agin, even if my childher are starvin', I mane it more than ever! For instead of lookin' to you, and the loikes o' you, my leddy, I mane to look to the Almighty God, who will never lave me nor forsake me if only I put my thrust in Him.' As Tim concluded, he once more buried his face in his hands, nor did he again remove them while Miss Barbara remained. This, however, was not for long; for Tim's broadside, as

sharp as it was unexpected, had told on Miss Barbara's hopes with such terrible effect that one alone remained. That one was Bridget, but as she raised her eyes in indignation at the conclusion of Tim's speech, they showed her Biddy in a corner on her knees, swaying backwards and forwards as she told the long string of beads that was twisted round the hands she was clasping and wringing in the energy of her devotion. Deeply incensed, Miss Barbara turned to the doctor, expecting perhaps to find on his countenance a gleam of triumph that might serve her as a pretext for commencing hostilities. If so she was disappointed, for a kind smile reigned there instead; as the doctor at that moment was fondling little Norah, and whispering to her to stroke his big dog.

'And this is the end then, is it, ungrateful man,' exclaimed Miss Barbara at length, slowly rising from her seat as she spoke,—'this is the end of all I have done for your welfare, and of all my prayers and hopes and strivings for you in the Lord? Woe to you, dark and benighted soul, returning once more to your trumperies and superstitions, like the sow who had been washed to her wallowing in the mire! But why should I address myself to you, poor ignorant tool that you are in the hands of designing Jesuits?' and Miss Barbara glared at the doctor, who had left off playing with Norah. 'Woe rather to those who by their threats and blandishments do, or help to do, the devil's work for him! Well, I only hope when the last hour shall come for them, they may not have to repent in endless misery the deed they have this day done!' As she spoke she marched out of the room, darting another glance of indignation at the doctor in passing, so terrible

that it almost looked as though the hope she had expressed 'were th' other way about intirely,' as Peter expressed it.

A silence of some moments' duration followed her departure, suddenly broken by a hearty though somewhat shaky huzzah from Tim. After this he insisted on shaking hands with the doctor and Peter and kissing the rest all round, while he reiterated over and over again his intention of 'sarving God for the future.' Then it was that the doctor once more drew his chair to the side of the bed, and taking little Norah on one knee, while Bat monopolised the other with his broad black nose and heavy paws, he sat and talked to the little group that were gathered around him. For a short time he spoke of Tim's delinquencies, but very soon quitted the subject and talked to him instead of the one bright and beautiful Church of God, and of the privilege of living and dying in the one true Fold. It was a very long talk; but so intent was the doctor upon his subject, and so earnest were his auditors, that the home-returning labourers were tramping past the cabin-door, and the whir of the evening beetle was stealing in at the little window before he rose from his seat, or remembered that he had not yet dined.

At last the clock struck seven, and then the doctor bade farewell to his patient amid a chorus of prayers and blessings, and set out for Killnew, where he found his housekeeper, old Betty, ruefully contemplating with many lamentations his half-spoiled dinner. After consoling himself, as almost every man does over a poor dinner, with the classical reflection that 'hunger is the best cook,' the doctor attacked the viands, and whether they were 'good, bad, or indifferent,' certainly did ample justice to

them. As soon as his dinner was over, he started for a second visit to the Glebe House; for not only was he anxious to transact the business that had taken him there in the afternoon, but he longed to give Maude a description of his experiment on Tim and the discomfiture of Miss Barbara.

He was highly delighted with his success; and as he walked along the quiet lanes and up the drive leading to the Glebe House, a smile played upon his face almost as bright as the sunset that bathed the scene around him. It was a lovely evening, and the soft summer breeze that stirred the leaves above his head seemed to breathe forth a spirit of peacefulness exactly in harmony with his own happy thoughts. As he approached the house a low strain of music stole through the drawing-room window and made him quicken his pace, for if there was one pleasure that he appreciated more highly than another it was a musical evening with his friends at the Glebe House.

The servant admitted him, and he was, as usual, about to wend his way towards the drawing-room when he heard himself hailed in an opposite direction. The sound evidently proceeded from Mr. Neville's study. To the study, therefore, the doctor repaired, and there discovered his old friend in company with Professor Broadview, who had arrived that very evening from Dublin. They were highly delighted to see him, the professor especially, who held up a large folio just fresh from the press, of which he was cutting the leaves. On close examination it proved to be a digest (to which the professor had largely subscribed) of the sayings, doings, discoveries, investigations, deduc-

tions, calculations, hypotheses, suppositions, &c., of a certain archæological society, of which both the old gentlemen were members. They informed him that they were engaged in discussing a most important point concerning an Egyptian inscription, and that he had just arrived in time to give them his opinion. In vain the doctor pleaded his ignorance of the subject under discussion; the avowal was only attributed to his modesty. In vain he pleaded that he had not yet paid his court to the ladies; Mr. Neville pooh-poohed the objection. In vain he pleaded anything at all; for, *volens volens*, they were determined to have him. Alas for the vanity of human expectations! No more of either Mozart, Mendelssohn, or Beethoven did the doctor hear that night than the few stray notes that stole in from time to time at the open window. For the professor drew one of the green-morocco chairs to the table, Mr. Neville pushed him into it, and, in his own phraseology, the doctor was 'nailed' for the evening. And there he sat, just about as listless and uninterested as you and I perchance might be, gentle reader, were somebody to retail for our especial benefit all that was read that night for his out of the voluminous report of the R.A.S.

It was long before the question at issue was dropped; indeed it must have continued *ad infinitum* (for each of the champions refused steadily to be convinced that he was wrong), had not the professor chanced to start another upon which his old chum disagreed with him also. This provoked a fresh discussion, during which it is to be feared that the doctor was sadly inattentive; but his abstraction passed unnoticed by the disputants, who had

small reason to be dissatisfied with a man who contented himself with the part of a listener. For two whole hours the old men wandered amid crumbling cities, Runic monuments, half-obliterated camps, and mysterious hieroglyphs ; and all the while the doctor looked as miserable as any Marius could have done, sitting among the ruins. He yawned hideously behind the report of the R.A.S., nearly 'nodded to his fall' two or three times over, and felt almost inclined to embrace the man as a brother who at last broke up the conference by bringing in the coffee.

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. O'MEARA was not the only person in the Glebe House that was that evening disappointed by the R.A.S. Two of the ladies had seen him arrive, and each of them, for reasons of her own, was somewhat anxiously expecting him in the drawing-room. Miss Barbara for one ; for by way of relief to her wounded dignity she had intended to sweep majestically out of the room the instant he should enter it, and had been, moreover, practising certain glances of indignation to dart at him which, far more effectually than any words could do, were to wither him to the very roots.

Miss Fanny was the other ; for demure as she looked, really and dearly did the little maiden love fun and frolic, and in no form did she relish it better than in that of a serio-comic argument with the doctor. Certainly these encounters very much resembled those of their respective

favourites, Bat and Looloo, which always terminated in the inglorious rolling over of the latter, although he was always the aggressor; and they had, moreover, like them, the advantage of being fully as amusing to the lookers-on as to the parties concerned. This evening Fanny was in the humour for fun, and she listened impatiently for the doctor's footsteps, all the time that she busied herself in trying to twine wild-flowers on Looloo's ears.

Very different were Maude's sensations; for, notwithstanding Fanny's sisterly endeavour to eradicate from her cousin's mind the effect produced upon it by aunt Barbara's insinuations, they had made quite as deep an impression upon her as that lady could have desired. In spite of all that Fanny could do or say to rally her, and she had done and said a great deal that evening, Maude had remained silent and abstracted ever since, plying her needle with an industry that owed at least half its energy to her indignation, and revolving over and over again in her thoughts an endless variety of fears, doubts, and misgivings. Upon aunt Barbara's return from her expedition to Tim's cabin, in order to retire as far as possible from that lady's vicinity, Maude had seated herself at the piano, and hers had been the music that had greeted the doctor upon his arrival. The outer world little suspects the host of associations that lie in the strains over which young hearts have suffered themselves to dream. There was not an impromptu, or nocturn, or symphony that Maude Neville played that evening, that had not for her a language of its own. As one plaintive air after another stole forth from the keys in deep, passionate, masterly chords, the reflections that had agitated her all the evening

were remembered no more, and though apparently intent upon her music she wandered far, far away, in one of those airy daydreams that bright young spirits love so dearly to indulge in—dreams in which imagination, like a golden shuttle, gleams and glances through the warp and woof of the past and future, till it weaves them into a web of fact and fiction that to the dreamer's fancy seems a fabric of unmingled truth; dreams over which sage Matter-of-Fact shakes his head and groans, but which are perhaps, after all, only part of a process necessary to preserve the more delicate fibres of some natures from abrasion in their after-contact with the world; dreams too, alas, at which the dreamer himself will smile in years to come, when his fairy tissue shall have grown faded and threadbare, and the objects over which he had cast it shall stand out in their native bareness and stern reality.

Maude's music and reveries were at length interrupted, much to Fanny's disappointment, by the entrance of a servant with the tea, and with it a message from Mr. Neville, informing them that the gentlemen would not join them that evening, as he had ordered coffee to be carried to the study. Maude was deeply relieved, the more so that Miss Barbara, finding it impossible to annihilate her adversary that evening, took herself off at once. About an hour later the servants came in and Fanny read prayers, after which, with many a fond kiss and earnest injunction to Maude, 'not to think any more about aunt Barbara,' she retired for the night. Maude soon after rose, and lighted her candle with the best possible intention of following her example. But, unstrung as she still felt, it was evident to her that sleep would be altogether

out of the question, and her writing-desk at this moment chancing to catch her eye, she sat down instead, to write to Mrs. Carew.

No sooner, however, was the pen between her fingers than she realised how difficult was the task she had undertaken; for that very morning she had decided the long-wavering balance, and had resolved to become a Catholic, whoever and whatever it might cost her. Still it formed no part of her present intention to inform her old friend of the momentous step she contemplated, implying as it did a change, not only in her religious convictions, but in her plans, prospects, and everything else that concerned her. And yet to write in the old familiar strain of unreserve, with the consciousness of such a secret lying between herself and her adopted mother, was a task beyond her power, and seemed, moreover, a species of dissimulation from which her frank nature intuitively shrank. For at least one hour she sat weighing the pen in her fingers, and reading and re-reading the few words she had written. But after a while her thoughts left Mrs. Carew and wandered to a subject more perplexing still. To whom must she now turn for aid among the difficulties that would so soon rise around her? 'For, alas,' said a rising sigh, 'not now to Dr. O'Meara! In this question of religion he, of all others, must be excluded, lest the world might see in his interference a confirmation of aunt Barbara's suspicions.' And if it did, and gave its verdict accordingly, would there be any justice in it? Had one single thought of Richard O'Meara influenced her in her decision? So instantaneous, so clear, so honest a 'No' flashed from every nook and corner of her conscience that

she could not fail to be satisfied. No, with all her heart and soul she could say that only for the sake of the God who had founded His Church had she sought to return to it; only for the sake of the Lord and Master who has reared His tabernacle among the children of men had she desired to find it, and make it the home of her heart.

One half at least, then, of aunt Barbara's accusation had been false. Was there any truth in the second? Was she not totally indifferent to Dr. O'Meara, except inasmuch as she was bound to him by ties of common gratitude? Very slowly an answer rose from the uttermost depths of her heart; and as it rose Maude grew troubled, like one who has raised a spirit in his own despite. And yet it was only a vague, trembling, incoherent little answer after all; one that would have remained contentedly buried in its native depths for ever had not her question summoned it to the surface. But shadowy as it was it bitterly upbraided her, and as she listened to its phantom voice Maude burst into tears.

But this fit of weakness was of short duration, for Maude's courage was too high to be easily cast down, and she soon turned her attention to the best means of repairing the evil. Something, it was evident, though she hardly knew what, must be rooted out; and, knife in hand, our little heroine set herself to the work of eradication. Barren, indeed, did half an hour's determination make the face of the future look; but not for an instant did she waver in her resolution, until hardly a green leaf remained of all the verdure that had embellished her young life. No more brotherly confidences, no more playful raillery, no more leaning on the strong arm, or

reliance on the strong will for support, no more softness or sentiment—nothing for the future but cool, calm, quiet, every-day civility.

With the firm satisfaction of a monarch who, having gained a victory over rebellious subjects, sheathes his sword with a forced indifference to their losses and his own, Maude joined her hands, and, leaning her face upon them, looked out into futurity with hard resolute eyes that seemed to bid every remaining atom of womanly weakness defiance. She was sitting thus, in the full flush of her victory, when the door suddenly opened, and Dr. O'Meara stood before her.

He had come for a book he had left that afternoon on the table, and naturally expecting that the ladies had long since retired, and that he should find the room in darkness, had brought a candle in his hand. For an instant he stood with it, raised high above his head, peering into the lighted room in a fashion truly ludicrous. The next he hastened forward with a laugh at his blunder, feeling and looking highly delighted at the unexpected chance thus afforded him of bidding Miss Neville good-night, and telling her his story about Tim and aunt Barbara. Never was man more utterly confounded than O'Meara at his reception. The faintest possible smile responded to his joyous laugh, a few nervous troubled words acknowledged his hearty greeting, and then Maude relapsed into silence, looking so unlike her usual self, that the doctor was fairly puzzled. All unconsciously she had started from her chair at his entrance, and for a few moments they stood facing each other, as though neither knew exactly what to say next.

O'Meara was the first to recover his usual equanimity. 'You must pardon me if I have startled you, Miss Neville; but I need not say that I should have entered less unceremoniously had I imagined that I was about to break in upon a lady's meditations. I had no idea that you protracted them to such an hour as this. Do you not believe in "beauty sleep"?' he asked, trying in vain to recover his ordinary manner.

Maude now remembered for the first time that she was standing, and resumed her seat. 'It is a thing I do not trouble myself much about,' she replied, as she busied herself in replacing some papers in her desk; 'but I am not often up as late as this. I stayed because I wished to write an important letter, and it is so much easier to collect one's thoughts when everything is quiet. The house has been so still, I did not expect an interruption.'

The moment after she would have given worlds to have unsaid the words, for in the momentary glance she took at him she saw that they had touched him to the quick. She was right. Without another word he crossed the room for his book, and then, returning to the table, held out his hand and quietly bade her good-night. There was an agitation in his voice and a troubled look on his face that grieved her to the very heart; but with the resolution she had inherited from her father she stifled her regret, and coldly returned his salutation. As to the doctor, he walked home that night lost in perplexity, and with a shadow resting upon his heart as deep as the darkness that now lay upon the scene around him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the second evening after the events recorded in our last two or three chapters, and a close, cloudy, and very sultry evening it was. Such a one as often succeeds a day of sunshine and preludes a night of storm : when a strange stillness broods in the air, and when neither a leaf stirs on the trees, nor a ripple on the water ; when the horizon glows with a lurid copperish tint, and bright little flashes of lightning dart from cloud to cloud ; while the low muttering thunder keeps up such a continuous rumble in the distance, that it sounds like the voices of angry giants growling at each other in their dens among the hills far, far away.

It was between seven and eight o'clock, and Dr. O'Meara had just dined ; that is to say, he had done as much towards dining as a man in such a temperature possibly could. This business concluded, he had pushed his chair back from the table, and entered into a speculation as to whether there could possibly be any better way of cooling a room than to set every door and window it contained wide open. When he had disposed of this question, by deciding that there was not, he turned to another, evidently a far more difficult one to solve than the last : should he or should he not go to the Glebe House ? Hardly for one moment, since he had parted from Miss Neville two nights before, had he ceased to torture himself in trying to discover the cause of her altered manner towards him, and yet he felt that he was just as far off from a solution of the mystery as ever. Should he seek her, and

with all simplicity ask her the reason why? For a full quarter of an hour did the doctor sit weighing and re-weighing the pros and cons, without coming to a decision. Then he rose and walked into the garden, where he stood another quarter of an hour, apparently watching his bees, but still revolving the question, and just as irresolute as ever. Suddenly a most substantial idea started up in the form of Professor Broadview. At any rate, whether he addressed himself or not to Miss Neville, he must go to the Glebe House: for had he not promised the old gentleman to lend him a certain treatise, and surely common politeness demanded that he should keep his promise? Yes, he would go. If he started at once he should get there before the storm; and then, perhaps, he might casually obtain a hint from somebody at the rectory that might help him to solve this most perplexing question.

In the full flush of this determination the doctor walked towards the house; but just as he reached the door a click at the garden-gate made him turn his head. At first he only perceived a little ragged urchin fumbling with the lock; but when, the next minute, Bob set the said gate open to its very widest extent, and began touching his cap—or rather as much as remained of a cap—with great marks of respect, to somebody still out of sight, he plainly saw he was to expect an arrival. Nor was he mistaken; for the moment afterwards the portly form of Father Donovan appeared in the gateway, mounted on his chubbiest of ponies—Master Rory—and trotted briskly up the path. Never in his life before had the arrival of any guest brought a shadow across Richard O'Meara's face, and certainly never before, since he had known him, had

he seen Father Donovan approach him without a smile. But this evening a shadow for once certainly did overcast his countenance when he perceived his visitor. But it was a very transient one after all ; for before Master Rory had trotted half way up the path it had vanished, and by the time he had reached the door the smile had come in its stead, and with it a welcome to his reverend guest that came from the very bottom of the doctor's heart.

Before many minutes had elapsed Master Rory was quietly champing his corn in the stable, greatly to the astonishment of the doctor's Phœbe, who eyed the newcomer very suspiciously over the side of her own stall. We need not tell how it fared meantime with his master—how the old housekeeper bustled about, and served up a little dinner in a quarter of an hour that Father Donovan declared was the best he had ever tasted. Nor need we tell how the doctor fetched out a dessert afterwards, that O'Keefe's own hands had gathered that very morning at Neville Court ; nor how happy the doctor looked as he discharged the sweet duties of hospitality, only regretting that his visitor could not eat ten times more, and that he had not something ten times better to place before him.

As Father Donovan had only returned the preceding evening from his summer trip, as may be imagined, he and his host found plenty to talk over and plenty to laugh over too. But after a while they looked very serious, and their voices grew low and hushed ; for their conversation turned to a subject—that most distressing of all sad subjects to a loyal Catholic heart—the state of affairs in Rome. Amongst other friends, the priest had been visiting a gentleman, whose son, a fine manly young fellow of five-

and-twenty, had, with his full permission, joined the Papal Zouaves the preceding winter. Father Donovan had been very much interested in reading some letters written home by the young hero, especially by one that had arrived the very morning he had left, and which had given an account of the outbreak of cholera in Rome and its vicinity. The town of Albano, it said, had suffered very severely from its ravages; and there, during two days and nights, a small band of forty Zouaves had been the sole nurses of the sick and grave-diggers for the dead. After expatiating on the heroic self-devotion of these his companions in arms, the letter of Stephen O'Halloran had thus concluded: 'If, dear mother, they had left the ties and comfort of home only to perform these offices of love to their suffering fellow-creatures, it would have been a great happiness; but how does even such a happiness as this pale before the exquisite satisfaction we experience, when we remember that God is deigning to use even our poor weak arms of flesh and blood for the defence of the Holy See!'

The season of which we are writing was one of comparative quiet in the States of the Church. The disastrous days of Castel Fidardo and Ancona were becoming things of the past. A temporary calm, at least, had succeeded the revolutionary tumult. The French bayonets were flashing round the Papal throne, while the noble army of Zouaves asked for nothing greater, nobler, or higher than to die for their Pontiff-king. And yet the sons of the Church trembled. 'Coming events cast their shadows before;' and there was something so portentous in the very stillness of Garibaldi and his myrmidons that the children of

Pio Nono, with the instinctive forebodings of filial love and veneration, felt there was mischief brewing against their Father in the depths of that sacrilegious host.

No wonder, therefore, as Father Donovan related all he had heard and gleaned in Dublin and other places relative to the Italian insurrection, that, as he listened, Richard O'Meara's heart grew heavy with dreary forebodings, though his eye flashed and his cheek kindled with unwonted indignation. So engrossed indeed did they both become in discussing the probable issue of events that the August twilight had faded almost into darkness before the priest awoke, to the fact it would soon be night, and that he was expected at a gentleman's house quite three miles off, where he had arranged to say Mass the following morning. At that very moment, however, the old house-keeper appeared with the candles, and informing the priest that it was beginning to rain heavily, joined her master in begging him to remain all night. As she spoke, a soft murmuring rustle among the trees outside corroborated the fact, and five minutes later the long-threatening storm had broken into a perfect deluge of rain. A tempest at night in a mountain region is no trifle, with the lightning flashing above, around, below you, and the thunder booming round you like a battery of guns. After the priest had looked out for a few minutes upon the storm, he felt more than satisfied that he and Master Rory were in such comfortable quarters for the night. Nor was old Betty one whit less content, as she bustled about in her domain, airing and re-airing sheets and pillow-cases; only pausing to bless herself whenever a brighter flash than usual set her poor old heart pit-a-pat. The 'benefit of clergy' in such a

storm as that more than compensated for any amount of extra trouble in Betty's humble opinion.

Our friends resumed their seats, but the thread of their conversation was broken. It was no longer 'ultra-montane,' but respecting the sayings and doings of the people of Ballycross during Father Donovan's absence, and amongst others of lower degree, of course the inhabitants of the parsonage naturally came in for a due share of attention. The questions that the priest asked concerning them were apparently casual enough, and yet a very close observer might have remarked that when, among the rest, he mentioned Miss Neville, he fixed his eyes somewhat inquiringly on his companion's face. But all unconscious of his scrutiny sat the doctor, for the very mention of Maude's name brought back with it the train of ideas that had so perplexed him all day. Very quietly, however, though rather abstractedly, he answered Father Donovan's questions; and then, caressing Bat's big black head, that lay as usual on his knee, and looking into the soft brown eyes that seemed to answer his with an expression almost human in its earnestness, he fell into a dream.

There was a silence of some minutes' duration, broken at length by the priest.

'*Apropos* of Miss Neville, Richard, what do you suppose I heard in Dublin about you and her?' he asked suddenly.

If the doctor attempted a guess, he was too much astonished to be aware of the fact, and only sat, open-eyed and open-mouthed, staring at the speaker.

'I heard nothing more nor less than that you had

matrimonial designs upon the heiress of Neville Court, and that she was not altogether unfavourable to your suit !'

'And how dared any one,' cried O'Meara, rising from his chair, while the wrath and dignity of all the O'Mearas in his pedigree flashed in his eyes and quivered in his voice,—'how dared any one take such an unwarrantable liberty with either of us?'

'Nay, that is more than I or any other man can tell you. All I know is, that ever since the world began women—ay, and men too—have tattled about their neighbours ; and so it will be, depend upon it, until the end of time.'

'But what did you do?—what did you say to them, Father Donovan?' asked the doctor, once again seating himself, but still looking quite aghast.

'What did I do? why, nothing! Fighting, you know, is not my vocation; besides, the offenders were ladies,' said the priest, smiling. 'And what did I say? In one place I told them, in the politest manner I could, to mind their own business; at another I waited till their remarks were finished, and then let drop, in the course of conversation, that Dr. O'Meara was one of my most intimate and valued friends. That was punishment enough for some of them, I can tell you.'

The doctor was thunderstruck. In all his relations with Maude the one intention of his heart had been so pure and single, that the possibility of misconstruction had never entered his mind. The life, moreover, that he had hitherto led had, from its unobtrusiveness, been so unmarked by the world, that to find himself suddenly talked about was a fact too startling for him to realise.

‘It has been a question with me,’ continued Father Donovan, after a pause, ‘whether to mention all this to you or not. I have decided on doing so, however, for one or two reasons; the chief one, that I thought a word in season might put you upon your guard for the future. By a curious concatenation of evidence I have traced a great deal of this tattle to the old lady stopping at the Glebe House; so beware of her.’

The reply was a burst of adjectives by no means flattering to Miss Barbara, to which Bat, roused from his slumber, added a few deep growls, doubtless by way of assent, for Bat by no means favoured aunt Barbara.

‘Still, to warn you against the dangerous tongue of this individual,’ continued the priest, ‘was not my only intention in mentioning the subject to you. Richard, my boy, will you let a very old friend give you a few words of advice?’

An unmistakable assent beamed in the doctor’s face, and the priest continued,

‘No man living knows better—I may perhaps say as well as I do—the purity and unselfishness of your motives with regard to Miss Neville, nor the perfect singleheartedness that has marked all your relations with her; but the world, Richard, will judge you by another code. I do not say it denies the existence of honourable sentiments, but, to say the least, it regards them as *rarissimæ aves*, the greater part of which took wing long ago, with the other bright and beautiful attributes of chivalry. Now the world knows that Maude Neville is rich, talented, beautiful, and an orphan; and knows, on the other hand, that a certain young doctor in her neighbourhood, talented,

agreeable, to a certain degree good-looking, and (as is commonly the case with most of his profession) no richer than he need be, is frequently in her company. This much the world either sees or hears, and this much is true. But next comes its construction; and it is of this that I wish to speak to you. Nor is this a new desire on my part. It is now two or three months since I first felt that, even in our own little circle here, you were misunderstood; and though I never expected to hear strictures upon your conduct as coarse as those of Miss Barbara and her friends, I felt sure that in some form or another, sooner or later, something would be said.'

He paused, but the doctor made no reply.

'You must not take what I am saying too much to heart, my dear fellow,' he continued, casting as he spoke a glance of the tenderest sympathy at his friend. 'Remember, Richard O'Meara is not the first man who has had his actions misread and his intentions misinterpreted. Come, come, you are not old enough yet to have forgotten your Catechism and the Eight Beatitudes; and if so, surely it isn't your intention to turn your back on a blessing at the first go off?'

The doctor smiled sadly. 'I suppose I am a coward, but I think I may say that, if the world had only attacked me individually, I would have borne its calumnies with patience.'

'Ah, tut; not a bit of it!' cried Father Donovan, laughing. 'Don't flatter yourself that all your sensibilities are aroused on behalf of Miss Neville! Of course you are grieved that she should have her name bandied about; but I think the charge of scheming and fortune-hunting

brought against somebody else is not wholly without a sting—eh ?’

‘Indeed it is not,’ cried the doctor, shrugging his shoulders and shivering as he spoke, as though with cold. ‘Still, if it were not for her,’ he continued, rising and pacing the room hurriedly, ‘I would continue to act as I have hitherto acted, and live down this, or a hundred such calumnies. But for her sake—’

‘For her sake,’ said the priest gently, ‘all must be altered. Miss Neville will soon be of age, and is evidently most desirous to do her duty as a landowner. She will very soon come into possession of her estates, and purposes then to take up her residence at her ancestral home. She is a woman of high principles and good common sense, and so determined that justice shall be done to every one, that in my opinion your promise to your father and his to Lady Neville are fulfilled, and whatever interest you may henceforward take in the affairs of the tenantry, it will be from inclination, not from duty. And you will rejoice at this if you will only look at matters as they stand, from a rational point of view. Just think for one minute how many times lately you have had interviews with Miss Neville upon one piece of business or another, and then tell me if you are surprised that the world has canvassed your motives. Now for the future, if you are wise, you will only meet her as her other friends do, occasionally, and you will find that the world will see its blunder and cease its chatter, thoroughly ashamed of having made it. You will be no longer misjudged, and, what is of far more consequence, Maude Neville will be no longer misrepresented.’ He paused, and for a while nothing was heard but the low

growl of distant thunder, and the rushing of the soft summer rain as it pattered heavily among the trees outside.

‘Are you angry with me?’ he asked at length.

‘Angry! What, a Catholic angry with his own parish priest because he says a word or two to him in season? God forbid! No; I thank you from the bottom of my heart for every word that you have said; still, much as I have had the interest of the tenantry at heart, this has not been the only tie that has bound me to Maude Neville: there has been something stronger still.’

He rose as he spoke, and after searching some time in his strong box, he placed a yellow document in the priest’s hand.

‘Read that,’ he exclaimed; and added in a voice that trembled with emotion, ‘I found that letter in a secret drawer of my father’s old escritoire after his death. See how solemnly it commits her to him. He has passed away, and I stand in his place. Father Donovan, do you understand my mission now?’

There was so much enthusiasm and solemnity in his tones, such a deep persuasion that the very salvation of a soul was intrusted to him, that, amused as the priest was at the idea, he could not help admiring the earnestness of the speaker, and it was some few minutes before he replied.

‘Do, my dear boy, reflect one moment,’ he exclaimed at length; ‘what has this letter to do with you? Wise men tell us that “there is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous.” Now, to me, the fact of a dying mother committing the care of her infant’s soul to an old and valued friend is sublime; but that of a young man being

intrusted with the religious welfare of a beautiful young heiress is simply ridiculous. My dear O'Meara, that you, with your practical common sense, should ever have entertained an idea so quixotic surprises me more than I can say. And pray, if it was your mission to convert Miss Neville, what have you done towards it ?

Father Donovan's tone was so completely the opposite of what the doctor had anticipated that he was thoroughly disconcerted.

'That is the question,' he replied, somewhat stiffly, and looking vexed in spite of himself, 'and a question that has kept me awake many a long hour.'

'I should think so, yet all that was required of you was to have handed the letter over to me, for it ought to have been placed in Miss Neville's hands long since. Who knows what effect it might have had upon a mind already biased towards the truth ? So you found it in a secret drawer, did you ? Then your father evidently put it there, and afterwards forgot that he had done so. Poor old man, his memory was sadly impaired before his death. Often I have heard him wondering what could possibly have become of it, and at last he came to the conclusion that he had destroyed it by mistake. He never ceased lamenting the loss of it, because he wished to give it to me, that I might hand it over to Maude Neville as soon as she came to Ballycross. I wish you had given it to me before.'

'So do I with all my heart,' cried the doctor, with a very troubled look on his face, as he handed the letter to the priest.

Their conversation was here interrupted by the entrance

of old Betty, who came to clear the tea-things and get a kind word or two from 'the father, God bless him!' After her departure, the doctor fetched the chess-board and arranged the pieces; but though he did his utmost to recover his wonted spirits, his abstraction was only too evident. It was a somewhat uninteresting game, for the play on the doctor's part was anything but scientific; and when it was over the priest pleaded fatigue, and asked permission to retire.

His example was soon after followed by the doctor; but little did Father Donovan suspect as he travelled through his Matins and Lauds, and then laid him down to sleep the sleep of a weary man, how fierce a battle was fought and won in that adjoining chamber. Perhaps he might have read the secret, had he stayed to breakfast, in the haggard looks of his host. But at a very early hour Father Donovan was on his way to the house at which he had arranged to say Mass, and when O'Meara came down to breakfast he found that his reverend guest had departed nearly two hours before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VERY important personage in his own estimation, and in that of the little world around him, was Barney Lenighan, the Ballycross postman. The very personification of official dignity looked he, as, with his leathern bag slung over his shoulder, he plodded patiently along the highways and byways of his allotted district, as ragged—I

beg his pardon, as picturesque—as he was light-hearted, as witty as he was slow. For summer sun and winter snow, equinoctial gales and autumn rains, were all alike to Barney; and whether he climbed a mountain or descended one, threaded a wood or picked his way over a bog, ‘Slow and steady’ was his motto, and as nobody ever presumed to question its propriety he never quickened his pace.

A different kind of experience was Barney’s from that of his city brethren; but though his progress was not marked like theirs by a succession of electrifying ran-tans, his visits were often the turning-point of many a humble fortune and the crisis of many a hidden life. Letters that communicated the crashing of banks and foundering of fortunes, the deaths of rich relations and the births of heirs to vast estates, rarely, perhaps never, found place in Barney’s bag; but letters strangely folded and wonderfully spelt, bearing English, American, and Australian postmarks, brimful of love for ‘the ould home, the ould counthry, and the ould faith,’ often rewarded the mothers’ hearts and lovers’ eyes that had waited and watched for many a day in silent expectation. And then who more glad than Barney, or who more important than he, as with spectacles on nose he read the precious document, aloud or apart, as the case might be, for those who were not able to read it for themselves?

Never perhaps since the day that the first postman, whoever he may have been, started on his rounds, had two letters of greater importance to those about to receive them been jogged in a leathern bag than two that Barney carried one morning across the hills, addressed, among others, to the Glebe House, Ballycross. And yet so slow

had been Barney's progress on this particular occasion, that, although the parsonage was his first house of call, the breakfast-party had broken up long since, and, forgetting the very existence of a post, had separated to their several pursuits. When, therefore, the great bell rang, and a budget of various shapes and sizes was handed in at the door, what with Mr. Neville in his study, the professor in the library, Miss Barbara in her bedroom, and Maude in the garden, the old butler had to make quite a circuit of discovery before he could assign each epistle to its respective owner.

So unusually energetic was Barney's peal on this occasion that its echoes reached Maude in a little secluded nook at some distance from the house in which she and Fanny were accustomed to spend their summer mornings working and reading. They roused her from a deep and not very pleasant reverie; for Maude now regretted the course she had adopted, and admitted, to say the least of it, that her interview with the doctor had been highly unsatisfactory. Simple natures that wander from their simplicity are sure to lose their depth, and instead of rectifying evils invariably make them worse. Now that Maude had had time for reflection she was forced to admit that a little extra prudence for the future was all that had been required to meet the exigencies of the case, and that her iron resolutions had been simply waste of time.

That her coldness had had the effect she had intended was evident; for although a fortnight had now elapsed since the doctor's visit, nothing had been heard of him since. The professor had left, after one or two fruitless endeavours to see him, regretting that he had not been

able to show him a cast of coins that had arrived from Vienna the very morning after their conference. Fanny wondered, the rector grumbled from time to time at his absence, and talked of writing or calling to inquire after him, but of course did neither. Maude sat apart in the silence and isolation of her own heart, nursing the secret that accounted to her only too plainly for his absence. Still, while she regretted the course she had adopted, it was not without excuse, even to herself. It had been no light matter for a young girl in the first flush of her beauty and dignity, conscious of her own integrity, and possessing, moreover, no small share of personal, as well as family pride, to hear her motives suddenly questioned and her conduct canvassed. Something too had to be laid to the inopportune arrival of the doctor before she had been able to decide the course to be adopted with regard to him for the future. But, palliate her conduct as she might, the unwelcome truth remained that she had made a great mistake; nor could she hide from herself the fact that her efforts, like those of the well-intentioned but ill-judging peewit, had only succeeded in attracting the doctor's attention to herself, and that at a moment when she would have given worlds to have averted it. Over and over again she tried to reassure herself that she had been right after all, but her reasoning failed to convince her. Worn by her contending emotions, she began at length to grow pale and abstracted; and when Barney's extra-vigorous peal broke upon her ear, she started and even trembled. Her agitation increased when she heard the footsteps of the old servant advancing towards her retreat; and when he

handed her a letter, addressed to her in an unknown hand, she turned positively faint with a strange feeling of suspense, for which she would have found it very difficult to account.

Her letter was a short but very kind one from Father Donovan, and enclosed another so worn in every fold that Maude could hardly open it. She succeeded at last, and, with a strange wild wonder, read it through. She felt very grateful that she had received it there, where the little twittering birds and the busy bees were the only witnesses of her emotion. For nearly an hour she sat motionless as a statue, her hands clasped over the old letter that seemed to have come to her like a voice from the grave. Hitherto Maude's affection for her mother had been only a natural impulse; not a single token had she ever possessed of that mother's love for her. Now all was changed; for she held in her hand a proof how deep that love must have been, since it had lingered to the very last and battled even with death. That most touching of all scenes to an orphan's heart—a mother's death-bed—seemed to rise before her eyes, and she almost fancied that she felt a dying hand placed on her head to bless her. Again she read the letter, and then a question stole into her mind that, strange to say, had never intruded there before. Was she not already a Catholic? Both Dr. O'Meara and Mrs. Barton had spoken to her of her baptism by Father M'Grath; but so little had she considered the sacramental effects of that baptism, that she had never understood before that it had made her, before God, a Catholic for ever. Now she realised the fact, and with a thrill of delight saw herself no longer a

stranger seeking the right road, but a child on its Father's own domain, striving to get clear from the brambles and brushwood of a thicket into which it had unconsciously strayed. She sat lost in thought, until the sun, having found his way into her corner, began to beat down hotly upon her uncovered head. Then she rose and walked towards the house, when, having gained her chamber unperceived, she locked her door and sank sobbing on the bed, as though her heart would break with its burden of new-found happiness.

Very different had been aunt Barbara's epistle. As a rule, her correspondence was not of a very exciting nature, and quietly and coldly she had taken the letter from Joseph's hand. But not so quietly had she recognised the superscription, not so coldly had she perused its contents. A low ecstatic cry burst from her lips as she did so, and by the time she had read half way through she could proceed no further, but sat, with flushed cheeks and glistening eyes, unable to realise her happiness. It was a letter from the Rev. David Giles, not to ask, as he had asked before, for a few days' hospitality at the parsonage (though even that would have been bliss untold), but—O joy of all joys ever imagined or described!—to ask her to be his wife.

Uncle Edward too had received a letter, and very much startled his niece at luncheon by informing her that, probably within a very few days, business connected with her estate would take both her and himself to London. He endeavoured to hide from her the reluctance he felt to it, but Maude perceived it only too well; and though her heart thrilled with joy at the thought of seeing

Mrs. Carew, she only expressed her regret that he should have to suffer inconvenience on her account. How sincerely she wished, in her sweet generosity, that all could be his, and that the duties imposed upon him by his office as executor might be for his own benefit instead of hers ! But seeing her inability either to alter the law of entail or to regulate the duties of such an office, she could only kiss and pet him by way of sympathy.

But if Mr. Neville had startled his niece, aunt Barbara startled him very much more. For after luncheon she requested an interview with him in his study, and laid Mr. Giles's letter before him with a joy and triumph she tried in vain to conceal, and asked his advice respecting it. Why or wherefore nobody knew, least of all, perhaps, Miss Barbara ; for although Mr. Neville, with a disinterestedness truly heroic, advised her by every argument in his power to refuse her suitor point-blank, Miss Barbara adopted a course as diametrically opposed to his advice as a course could well be, and wrote and accepted David Giles that very evening.

'No fool like an old fool !' cried the world, when it heard of the projected match ; and this same shrewd old world was probably right. It reads black hearts and black secrets every day, and it must have understood better than aunt Barbara the motives that prompted a man of five-and-thirty to woo a woman of sixty-three endowed with ample means. Yes, the world was probably right, as it unfortunately so often is in its judgments ; and yet, unlovable as was aunt Barbara, and little-minded vulgarian as was the object of her choice, there was still something almost beautiful in this remnant of a womanly

impulse, craving to love and to be loved, that had survived the desolating influences, whatever they may have been, that had stricken Barbara Neville's character with hardness and harshness. As far as any one knew, this was the first offer of marriage that she had ever received. Had a different man spoken the same words thirty years before, instead of a dragon of discord, aunt Barbara might have been an angel of consolation. Who knows?

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER week passed away, and not a sign of Dr. O'Meara. Mr. Neville still talked of calling or writing, but shrunk from the exertion necessary for doing either one or the other. Fanny, too, had now begun to wonder, from time to time, what could have become of him, but evidently did not care sufficiently about the question to take any pains to solve it. Maude still went on her way, busying herself with a multiplicity of affairs, apparently her own bright self, though growing thinner and paler every day. 'Maudie, my child, you must take these things more quietly,' her uncle would say as he fondly stroked her hair. 'The whole of the estate put together is not worth the roses it is robbing you of. Take things quietly, child!' Maude did take things quietly, and without a single gesture of weariness would sit, morning after morning, in the library with Mr. Reynolds, patiently learning her new duties. No one suspected how much she missed the kind bright face that had so often

peeped in at the library door on these occasions, and stayed, sometimes for an hour at a time, helping them to make out something in Mr. Colquhoun's 'cooked accounts' that had perhaps been bothering them half the morning. And yet she did miss him, for it was Richard O'Meara himself who had put the idea into Maude's mind of personally superintending the management of her estate. At first the young girl had naturally shrunk from a pursuit so uncongenial to her tastes; but the doctor had shown her so plainly the advantage, both to herself and her tenants, of understanding the system that was to regulate the relation between them, that she had conquered her repugnance, and under his tuition and guidance had become, according to Fanny, 'quite a woman of business.' A less determined character, bereft of this guiding power, would have abandoned everything into her agent's hands. Not so Maude. Too much of Sir Morcar's strong will had descended to his daughter with her patrimony to allow her to be easily discouraged; and though her head often ached sadly over the large, ugly, red books, she still plodded on with a constancy worthy of Sparta in her most determined days.

Nor was this her only trial. Added to it was the ever-recurring question, in what manner she should free herself from the trammels of her adopted religion, and proclaim herself, in right of her baptism, a child of the Holy Roman Church. It was a difficult question for a young girl to decide alone, and night after night she pondered and planned, and came to a dozen different decisions, while day after day she wondered and waited, fearing to put any of them into practice.

It was hardly surprising that such a conflict should prove too severe for a constitution naturally delicate. Maude fell ill, so ill that Fanny one morning appeared at her father's bedside, and begged him, with tears in her eyes, to send for Dr. O'Meara, for she very much feared that Maude had caught a fever. Greatly alarmed, Mr. Neville despatched a messenger at once; and while Fanny watched her cousin with almost breathless anxiety upstairs, the clergyman, having dressed hurriedly, stationed himself at the library window to catch the first glimpse of the doctor. The news spread through the household like wild-fire, and the old servants, who had learned to love Maude hardly less than her relatives, fully shared with them the anxieties of suspense. In her distress Fanny had hastened to aunt Barbara, and begged her to come to Maude's room to see what she thought of her symptoms. But no sooner did the word 'fever' strike the tympanum of that lady's ear than she requested Fanny to leave her instantly, completed her toilette in frantic haste, and after harassing the whole household with fruitless demands for chloride of lime and other disinfectants, betook herself to a room over the stables, forbidding any one from the house to approach her under pain of her severest displeasure.

At last the messenger arrived with the intelligence that Dr. O'Meara had left two days previously for Dublin, but added that Mr. Frederic Donovan, who was taking his place during his absence, would be with them in a few minutes. The servant had hardly given his message before that gentleman arrived, and to the intense joy of everybody pronounced the illness only a feverish attack,

occasioned in a great measure by the unusual heat of the weather. He prescribed rest, quiet, and sedatives, and took his departure, after informing them that Dr. O'Meara would probably be absent for a fortnight.

Nobody remembered poor aunt Barbara in the general joy, and that venerable spinster sat unheeded in her retreat until absolute starvation forced her out of it. It was small consolation to find that she had been the victim of a false alarm, and she tried to complain. But such a unanimous verdict of 'served her right' beamed on every face she encountered, that after her breakfast (for which the cook, with a refinement of cruelty, contrived to make her wait another half-hour) she retired with a groan of disgust to her own room, where she consoled herself by writing twelve pages to her admirer, five of which she crossed.

In the mean time news of Miss Neville's illness had reached Neville Court, and very soon afterwards, as though on the wings of the wind, Mrs. Barton might have been seen on the road to the Glebe House. Then she set herself to the sweet task of nursing her darling, and so well did she prescribe for her, that at the end of a few days Maude looked almost as bright as usual, and had a long chat with Fanny, who made her laugh heartily over poor aunt Barbara's self-imposed captivity. After Fanny's departure, Mrs. Barton arranged her patient for the night, and having extinguished the lights, lest they might disturb her, knelt down in the quiet moonlight to say her night prayers.

The old lady's devotions were rather long, and the room was so quiet and the light so soft and dreamy, that

little by little the invalid's thoughts wandered back into a channel from which she had resolutely kept them during her illness. But both mind and body were too weak to face such perplexities calmly, and Maude soon burst into a quiet fit of weeping. But, quiet as it was, it reached the spot on which the old housekeeper was kneeling; and in a moment such loving arms were round her, and such a loving voice was praying to know the cause of her grief, that Maude could resist no longer, but told her the whole story of her religious convictions.

Great was Mrs. Barton's delight at the confidence; for she had begun to fear that a stiffness that had never characterised the mother would separate her from the daughter. She little imagined how groundless were her fears, and that often when she had thought her young mistress coldest, Maude had only been deterred from throwing herself into the arms in which her mother had died, and telling Mrs. Barton all, by the fear of compromising the faithful old creature with the Nevilles.

The housekeeper listened, lost in astonishment and gratitude, and when, at Maude's request, she had lighted the candles and read the old letter, she could hardly restrain her exclamations of delight. But she did restrain them fearing to excite her patient, and told her very quietly that the Jesuit priest who had written that letter so many years ago was still alive, and had moreover just returned to his old post in London, adding that she knew this to be the case because she had carried on an occasional correspondence with him ever since her residence in town with Lady Neville. She told her also a fact that delighted Maude almost as much as it surprised her,

namely, that hardly a letter had ever passed between them in which she had not been mentioned in some way or another. She said, moreover, that she verily believed the faith had been kept alive in her in answer to this good father's prayers, and begged Miss Neville to write to him at once and inform him of her desire to be reconciled to the Church. Maude replied that not only would she write to him the very next day, but that in all probability she should be able to call upon him in the course of a few weeks, as she expected shortly to accompany her uncle to London. Mrs. Barton hailed this intelligence as a direct interposition of Providence, and then, after a little more conversation, once again arranged her charge; and after a little tossing about from excitement, Maude fell into the soundest sleep she had enjoyed for some weeks.

During the next few days, Maude and Mrs. Barton had much to arrange and talk over, and many were the instructions the old woman gave her concerning the quarter of London in which she was to seek the Jesuit's house. At length Maude was judged sufficiently recovered to go down to the drawing-room, where Fanny received her with a delight little short of rapture. That first evening downstairs was truly a delightful one. 'Without a cloud,' Maude said; for Mr. Neville was in capital spirits, and Miss Barbara had received such a voluminous epistle that morning in answer to hers, that she was occupied the whole evening in her own room answering it.

Before many days Maude was quite herself again, and then a vast amount of preparation and packing commenced at the Glebe House; for another letter arrived urging Maude and her uncle to proceed to London at their earliest

convenience, as several documents were already awaiting their signatures. Dearly would Fanny have loved to have accompanied them, but she had already accepted an invitation for that very month ; as she had promised to visit the coast of Antrim with an old and valued friend of her mother's residing at Belfast, and the little maiden was far too unselfish to disappoint her, even for the far greater delight of visiting London. But she was disappointed, and much as she had desired to see the Giants' Causeway, thought it a very small thing indeed now that it was to be weighed in the scales with Regent-street and its shops, even though London should be out of season.

But though they were deprived of Fanny's society, the clergyman and his niece were not destined to want a travelling companion, for aunt Barbara suddenly signified her intention of accompanying them, as urgent business she said required her immediate presence in London. Of course Mr. Neville acquiesced with the best grace he could command ; but so little did he relish the additional charge of Miss Barbara and her luggage, that he almost contemplated postponing his journey. But Edward Neville was too innately chivalric to entertain such an idea long ; for if aunt Barbara was a dragon she was a woman, and as such had claims in common with all her sex upon his protection. ' Besides,' as Fanny wickedly whispered, ' it was only a somewhat uncomfortable means, to the very desirable end, of getting rid of her for ever.'

In the course of a day or two Fanny's old friend arrived, and bore her off in triumph on her northern tour, never imagining that half the sweet little hypocrite's smiles were counterfeits, and never knowing how large a portion

of her heart went in an opposite direction. The very next day our three London-bound travellers started on their way. The weather was beautiful, and Maude and her uncle so happy in each other's society, that they quite enjoyed their journey in spite of the rigid form that confronted them. Indeed it would have required something much stronger than even aunt Barbara's ill-temper to cloud Maude's happiness, now that she was actually on her way to Mrs. Carew; for immediately that lady had received tidings of the projected journey, she had sent a pressing invitation to both Mr. Neville and Maude. As both his sisters had left town for their country residences, Mr. Neville had been able to accept it without giving offence; and to Maude's great delight, her old friend's house was to be their home during their stay in London.

At last Euston station was reached, and aunt Barbara bade her nephew and his niece adieu. Only Mr. Neville himself knew the intense satisfaction with which he shook those thin bird-like fingers for the last time, and saw the incubus that had weighed him down for more than a year drive off in a cab crammed inside and out with boxes and hampers of Irish cheer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOTWITHSTANDING the instance with which Mr. Neville and his niece had been summoned to London, so many documents still remained to be prepared that their first week there was almost a leisure one. And a very pleasant week it was, for Mr. Neville spent it in taking the

two ladies to the various sights and amusements just then interesting the London world ; and whether they rambled over palaces, exhibitions, and gardens, or listened to wonderful tenors and divine sopranos, or discussed paintings and statuary, no one could possibly have said which looked the happiest of the three. For almost everything was new to the rector, who had been very little in town during the last few years, and to Mrs. Carew, who, like many another quiet old-fashioned London body, knew no more of what was going on around her than if she had lived among the South Seas, while to Maude even the scenes and objects she had seen twenty times before seemed to wear a fresh aspect altogether now that she visited them in the society of those she loved.

Had it not been for one dark misgiving, that week would have been to Maude one of unalloyed happiness and contentment. But, try as she would to banish it, the question would arise, and that often in scenes least in accordance with its gravity, 'What would they both say when they should learn the step she contemplated?' Still the brave little heart never swerved from its purpose ; or if a momentary thrill of temptation at times ran through it, when Mrs. Carew's voice, to her so long the voice of a mother, called her her own dear child, Maude thought of another Voice blessing those 'who shall persevere to the end' with still deeper parental love ; and then she grew as strong as a little lion in her resolution.

At length, like all other bright things, the pleasuring came to an end, and little as he relished it, poor uncle Edward had to attend to the business that had brought them to London. Maude was often obliged to accompany

him ; and so jealously did Mrs. Carew claim every minute of the time not thus devoted, that Maude began to despair of ever finding an opportunity for accomplishing the work so dear to her heart. One morning, however, about three weeks after her arrival, the long-sought occasion presented itself. Uncle Edward suddenly announced his intention of starting early to attend a trial in which he was much interested, and Mrs. Carew therefore proposed passing the morning thus unexpectedly placed at their disposal in a long-projected shopping expedition. Just, however, as they were about to start, a friend arrived to spend the day with Mrs. Carew, and that lady was of course obliged to stop at home to entertain her. She, however, directed Maude to the various establishments she herself patronised, and having given her a young servant as an escort, she started her off. Maude saw at once that such a golden opportunity as this must not be lost ; and as soon as she had completed her purchases, she desired the girl to wait for her at a confectioner's, and set off on her quest. For some little time the poor child felt all the fears natural to a young girl finding herself alone for the first time in busy thoroughfares. But these fears melted as her excitement increased, and her whole soul at last seemed to merge into the very different terror of meeting some one who might recognise her. Her confusion of mind was somewhat augmented by the fact that every cab she hailed was occupied ; and it was not until a friendly policeman took her under his wing, and called one for her, that she found herself on her way towards the long-anticipated but long-dreaded interview. At length the place was reached ; and directing the cabman to wait for her, Maude

alighted, and in five minutes was in the presence of a real live Jesuit priest.

To those who know this great and glorious Society we need say nothing of the interview that followed, nor of the effect it produced on Maude Neville. To those who do not we would simply say that she that morning found, not only a theologian to explain away her errors and difficulties, but a father to allay her fears, and a man acquainted with the world to point out the safest and most judicious course for her to pursue. Hers was a strange introduction to him; for she only laid his own worn and yellow letter in his hand, and burst into an unrestrainable fit of weeping. But he was expecting her visit, and recognised her immediately; for Mrs. Barton had written off in the first flush of her joy to tell him the good news; and unfamiliar to her as were his face and figure, Maude soon realised what a very old friend to her and hers he was.

She left him a new creature, with a heart so strong and a courage so high that she took his advice, and told Mrs. Carew everything the moment she entered the house. Our readers will easily believe that Maude could hardly trust her senses when that lady informed her, with a wonderful smile upon her face, that she herself had been a Catholic for some months, and that Maude had actually been consulting the very priest who had received her into the Church. No wonder he had first stared and then smiled at the mention of the name, and had counselled such unbounded confidence immediately afterwards. For some few minutes they mingled their congratulations, and then each told the other how she had been fearing that her change of religion would prove an insuperable bar to

the proposal that had been made with regard to Neville Court, and which each had desired so ardently. Then, with the delight of hearts suddenly freed from a weary and burdensome weight, they embraced each other over and over again, each declaring that she felt as if nothing else could ever be a trouble.

It was easy enough to call upon the Jesuit father now, and many were the expeditions Maude took in that direction with her friend during the next few weeks; many too were the hours they spent, side by side, in the 'dim religious light' of the Jesuits' church, before the altar upon which each had so lately found the faith, hope, and love of her life. At last the day was fixed for Maude's first communion, and the night before, with a face pale as death, but with a heart as stalwart as a little Crusader's, Maude told her uncle Neville her secret.

At first he was too much astonished to believe her, then as angry as Edward Neville could be; but after a time he softened down into sorrow, and declared she would break his heart. After a little quiet conversation he was, however, led to see things in a somewhat different light, and at length admitted that as she was now nearly twenty-one, as her mother had been a Catholic, and as Sir Morcar had certainly given his permission that she should be brought up in that religion too, he did not well see how anybody could control her. Therefore he supposed she 'must have her own way;' and with a few little sarcasms upon fast-days and penances, half serious, half in jest, and with a somewhat fonder kiss than usual, he dismissed her for the night.

When she had departed the clergyman took up his

candle and walked up to his own room, puzzling as he went 'whatever could have put such an idea as this into the child's head, after all the pains that had been taken by a whole family to bring her up a Protestant.' Poor Edward Neville! that the grace infused into her soul by her baptism might have had something to do with the matter never entered his head; and as it did not, the question was far beyond the depth of his philosophy. So he gave it up in despair; and pulling his night-cap over his ears, went to bed, and dreamed he was the Pope of Rome.

At the end of six weeks the business that had brought them to town was decided, and Maude and her uncle turned their faces homewards. It was a bright and beautiful October day, and as she looked at the English landscape, bathed in the still warm and mellow sunshine, there was a peace and happiness in her heart that she had little anticipated a few short weeks before. The dark cloud of distrust and dread of displeasure had floated away for ever, and before the whole world she now might say, 'I am a Catholic!'—before her uncle, kinder than ever, lest she should think him angry; before Fanny, whose sweet letter of sisterly regret at the news had only longed for the time when they should be at home to comfort each other, and realise that, after all, it was no real separation; before Mrs. Carew, now one with her in faith, and who was so soon to come to her, never to leave her more; before her tenantry, for Maude had written to Father Donovan, and she knew that by this time her conversion was no longer a secret. Was this all? Was there not another thought, brighter even than these, stealing

in among the rest, and deepening, gilding, intensifying them all with its own peculiar radiance? There was; for Maude had had a long conversation with Mrs. Carew about her troubles at Ballycross, and her adopted mother had plainly shown her that, like almost every one else who acts in a moment of excitement, Maude had made a great mistake. She showed her that she had been guilty of injustice, if not of positive ingratitude, towards a true and disinterested friend, and assured her that those whose intentions are honourable, whose conduct is prudent, and whose character is irreproachable, must infallibly live down misrepresentation. She cheered Maude by pointing out to her how very unlikely it was, at the same time, that a man as frank and open in character as she represented Dr. O'Meara to be, should suddenly break off his friendship with a whole family, by whom he had been so warmly received and appreciated, from motives of momentary pique with one member of it, and that without asking or giving one word of explanation to justify his conduct. She expressed her opinion that his absence, which had appeared so inexplicable to Maude, had been occasioned by his unexpected visit to Dublin; and that probably he was now anxiously expecting their return home, to explain all this to her uncle and herself.

‘Although,’ added Mrs. Carew, ‘I can well imagine that, in a temporary fit of annoyance at your sudden and unreasonable coolness to him, he did not care to make this explanation to you at the time.’

She concluded by advising Maude to treat her mother's old friend with the simplicity that had characterised their intercourse in its commencement. Not for one instant

did Mrs. Carew suspect the secret her child so jealously guarded from her; but even had she done so, the advice she gave her with regard to the doctor was so simple, that she could not possibly have spoken otherwise than she did.

How great a weight Mrs. Carew's gentle and judicious words lifted from poor Maude's perplexed heart might have been judged by the smile that played on her lips as she wondered what the doctor had said to the news of her conversion. In what words would he congratulate her? How, when, and where should she meet him first, and say those few kind words to him that were to prove that, however appearances might have been against her on that dreadful evening, she was not at heart ungrateful. As the locomotive sped on its way, bearing its living freight behind it, bright-eyed little messengers of hope, on painted wings, fluttered gaily around her, whispering, in tones of music sweeter than any she had ever heard before, that every breath of that panting engine said, 'a step nearer home.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE are few scenes more amusing to an English traveller, especially to one fond of studying the Irish peasantry in all the richness and raciness of their national characteristics, than the platform of an Irish railway station at the close of the English harvest. No sooner have the last echoes of the harvest-home died away in the fields and meadows of old England than band after band

of home-returning sons of Erin trudge off to the seaport towns, to crowd the steerage of every vessel that plies between the sister isles. The delight with which they rush, helter-skelter, through the gangway upon the shore of their native land, is only known to their enthusiastic hearts; for patriotism by no means objects to a ragged jacket, and many a man with a shorter name than Kosciusko has loved his country quite as well.

During the greater part of the year the passengers who book from Dublin for the more westerly districts are comparatively few and far between. But as on these occasions there is not a village hidden among the most distant hills and valleys of Connaught that has not furnished its tithe of adventurers, so there is not one of the said villages to which some are not travelling back a little richer and a great deal browner than they started, and Connaught railway tickets are at a premium. As Maude and her uncle sat *vis-à-vis* at a window of a first-class carriage, a laughing, joking, pushing, jostling crowd rushed by to the further end of the train, and amongst them the young heiress to her great delight recognised many a bronzed but familiar face. To her still greater satisfaction one or two recognised her; and several times during the journey a broad good-humoured countenance, grinning from ear to ear, looked in at the carriage window to inquire if 'anything could be done for the young leddy or Misther Neville.' It was a very pleasant thought to Maude that so many of her people were to be sharers in her joy at returning home, and made the latter part of her journey brighter even than the first. Long before the train reached the station it was greeted by a hearty cheer from the plat-

form, where a motley crowd had gathered, and though unheard by the passengers in the train it was answered by one almost as vociferous from the heads that were thrust out of the windows to catch the first glimpse of friends and relations. The doors were flung open, and long before the train stopped, at the imminent risk of legs and necks, half a dozen rash young fellows clambered down, and before they knew where they were found themselves locked in the arms of wives, mothers, children, sweethearts, and sisters. Nor were the embraces less fervent that nearly all the meetings were as unhoped-for as they were delightful. Every day after the close of the English harvest an expectant crowd besieges the doors and railings of the various stations on the Irish railways to inspect the arrivals, in no way deterred by the disappointment of yesterday from coming again to-day. Besides, though the greater part are undoubtedly doomed to personal disappointment, there is almost always sure to be a general joy among them after all; for in village life the happiness of one is the happiness of many, and even the hearts that are aching most over their own hope deferred have often the warmest congratulations to offer and the kindest questions to ask, and many return home, with a light in their eyes that the happiness of others has kindled, to wait for to-morrow's train.

What a light-hearted group they were! And what a kindly welcome they had for Maude, as she passed among them, telling them how happy she was to find herself and them safe once more in dear old Ireland after their travels! She had plenty of time for her congratulations; for until the stationmaster had exhausted his stock

of expostulations and threats about certain tickets that had been lost and others that had never been taken (all of course in vain, for there were the passengers, and there the tickets were not) nothing could be done in the matter of luggage. But in Connaught engine-drivers and stokers are models of patience and consideration, and railway porters never break their own necks or jamb other people's fingers in their hurry. A Connaught engine is the best-mannered locomotive in the world, for he will always wait till you are ready. Perhaps the fact that he is the sole traveller on the line, and is therefore free from the wholesome dread of collisions experienced by his brethren, may have something to do with the matter. On this particular afternoon he waited for the termination of the dispute concerning the tickets, then for the extraction of the Neville luggage from the various receptacles, and then, with a good-humoured snort of adieu, passed on his way, bearing onward still expectant hearts bound for more distant stations.

So truly did Maude sympathise with the happiness of the simple hearts around her, that it was not until she was seated in her uncle's carriage and had left them all behind that she became conscious that a shadow had fallen over the brightness of her own heart. Perhaps because the sun had now set behind the hills, and a chilly breeze had sprung up that sent the dead leaves whirling in eddying circles along the road and across the fields; perhaps because the long track of bog, no longer gilded by the sunshine, looked stern and dreary after the smiling scenery she had so lately quitted; perhaps, too, the fact that a face she had just a little expected to see at

the station had not been there,—may have had something to do with the shadow. The clergyman was soon deep in a book he had purchased that morning; and as the carriage wound slowly up and down the mountain road, Maude amused herself with looking through the window at the slightly-darkening landscape, and wondering how long it would be before Fanny came back. She looked tired and weary, as most people do at the close of a long journey. But for all this, as the carriage approached a small white house with a garden in front, very bright with dahlias and other autumn flowers, a look of quiet expectation again brightened her face for a minute. The gate stood wide open; but except old Betty hanging out linen in the distance not a sign of life was visible. The carriage passed on, and Maude threw herself wearily back and looked through the window no more.

Very bright were the faces of the old servants who hurried out when the carriage stopped at the door, while poor little Looloo went almost wild with delight. Then, as their drive had made them chilly, a fire was lighted in the library, and the travellers sat down to the cosiest of 'dinner-teas' imaginable. Mr. Neville's countenance was positively radiant with delight at finding himself once more at home—king of his own castle, as he phrased it—declaring that he only wanted his little Fanny back again to be the most contented man in the world. Had he been one whit less happy he might have rallied his companion, who had chatted so gaily all day long, on having grown suddenly somewhat silent and abstracted. But so interested was he in reminiscences of their visit, and in talking over future arrangements with regard to Mrs. Carew's

residence at Neville Court, that Maude was suffered to pursue her reflections, whatever they may have been, in peace. At the conclusion of the meal he announced his intention of taking a stroll before it grew dark, to see how things had been getting on during their absence ; and he had just risen from his seat when the door of the room was thrust suddenly open, and Bat's large black head appeared. In an instant all signs of listlessness had vanished, and a very bright smile of welcome shone in a pair of happy blue eyes instead, while, all unconsciously, a little white hand stole up to arrange a slightly-disordered curl. As a calm, quiet, dignified step traversed the passage and paused for an instant at the threshold of the door, a faint flush rose to her cheeks, the reflection of one of the brightest beams of sudden and unexpected pleasure that had ever flooded Maude Neville's simple life.

'Very glad to see you, doctor,' exclaimed the clergyman heartily ; and as he spoke he advanced to meet the new-comer with extended hand, which was the moment after warmly grasped in that of Father Donovan.

During the laugh that followed, Maude had time to recover from her astonishment, and then, after a few kind inquiries on both sides, accompanied by a speaking smile of congratulation on the part of the priest, they resumed their seats. Maude, who never sat idle, soon found some needlework, and with her head bowed over it very, very low, she sat like a statue and listened to the priest's answer to her uncle's query, what Father Donovan was doing with Bat. Simple as was the question, the reply was such that Mr. Neville could hardly trust his ears. Dr. O'Meara had left Ballycross a few days since, and the

period of his return was very uncertain. He had left several commissions to the priest, the principal to express his regret at having been obliged to leave before the return of friends he valued as highly as Mr. and Miss Neville ; but to tell them that he had been anxious to reach Marseilles by a certain day. He had also requested him to ask the latter if she would accept Bat as a remembrance from an old friend, and give him a corner in her stable at Neville Court.

All the dignity of the Nevilles was concentrated in Maude's gracious acceptance of the gift. She called her new possession gently to her side, and never in her life had she petted Looloo more quietly than she now twined her fingers in Bat's silken fringes. As Father Donovan had expected, Mr. Neville was deeply grieved and sorely puzzled by his friend's departure; but, accustomed as the worthy father was to dive into hearts and read countenances, he could not tell, for the life of him, how that departure affected the niece. She expressed a very simple and natural concern that her people should lose a friend who so thoroughly understood and appreciated them as Dr. O'Meara ; then once again she fixed her eyes upon her work, only occasionally pausing to make a few observations on certain events of their visit to London. Even after the gentlemen had retired to Mr. Neville's study to look at some books he had brought home, she still stitched resolutely away, as though no other thought, save her needle, occupied her mind. Suddenly, however, raising her eyes, they encountered Bat standing in the middle of the room, with his tail drooping like the feathers of a hearse, and his ears thrown back, as though listening for

a step, perhaps never to be heard again. It was too much for her stoicism, and calling the animal to her side, she slipped from her chair, and burying her face in his long hair, she exclaimed, in a tone of bitterest anguish, 'O Bat, Bat, how could you let him go?'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It is a fortunate circumstance for story-tellers and story-readers, an eminent writer of fiction somewhere remarks, that their progress is not restricted by the laws that govern that of ordinary mortals. For instead of following our heroes and heroines through the monotonous path of everyday life, we may pick out any salient points in their history that take our fancy, and leap from one to the other at will, ignoring the chasms between. Nor is this all, for at our request even Time himself will 'reverse his flight,' and bear us back again to periods through which we have already travelled, to spend them afresh with other forms and faces. Availing ourselves therefore of the old man's kind condescension in our regard, we shall leave Maude Neville amid the shadows of chill October to return to Richard O'Meara, whom we last saw pacing his room amid the heat and oppressiveness of a summer tempest.

One Sunday morning, about a fortnight after this, the doctor might have been seen standing in the sacristy of the little church with a somewhat disconcerted countenance. He had been for some few days very anxious to see Father Donovan; but shortly after his visit to O'Meara, the priest had left home to assist in a mission

that was being given in a town at some few miles' distance, and had not been to Ballycross since. On inquiry, however, at the presbytery, the day before, he had been told that Father Donovan would certainly be back in time to say Mass on Sunday, and he had been therefore awaiting his arrival with no little impatience, when the outer door had suddenly opened, and the good-natured face of Father Tom, the curate, presented itself. From him he learned that the missionaries had found themselves so well satisfied with the result of the Mission that they had arranged to stay another week, and that as a necessary consequence of this arrangement Father Donovan, much as he was wanted at home, had been obliged to promise to remain another week also.

'Well, well,' said O'Meara to himself, as, after thanking Father Tom for his information, he walked up-stairs to his seat in the little gallery, 'so that's the state of the case, is it? Well, if the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain; that's all.'

Unfortunately for the doctor and his mare, theirs was a case of half a dozen mountains instead of one, and both were consequently pretty well tired when they arrived that afternoon at Father Donovan's temporary lodgings in the town of ——. He was very pleased to see O'Meara, and many a subject of great interest to both was discussed with the dinner; but it was not till that was cleared away, and every other topic of conversation exhausted, that the doctor introduced the object of his visit.

'You were talking of miracles a few months since, Father Donovan. You little imagined when you turned in to visit me, a few nights since, that you were about to

work one yourself. And yet, if to open the eyes of the blind be a miracle, you have worked one to all intents and purposes.'

He paused; but except by a look of astonishment the priest made no reply, and O'Meara continued:

'I retired to my room that night a few minutes after you, but your words haunted me to such a degree that I found it utterly impossible to sleep, and I passed hour after hour in retracing calmly and quietly the events of the last few months. As I did so, I not only saw the truth of all you had said, but a very great deal more; so much, indeed, that I am no longer surprised that the world should have talked of me. I saw clearly that not only had appearances been against me, but felt that I had unwittingly suffered myself to succumb to the influence of Maude Neville, though, God knows, my own conscience acquits me, as you did the other evening, of any design whatever concerning her. I cannot express to you what an effect this discovery has had upon me; all through our intercourse I have fancied myself so purely influenced by duty. But if I have been blind to the end, I now see that Miss Neville, latterly at least, has read my unconscious secret; and this thought is galling indeed. Now I can perfectly understand the cause of a sudden coldness in her manner that mystified me very much at the time. What a perplexing situation hers has been, considering herself indebted to me on the one hand for the trifling services I have rendered her, yet despising me on the other for a weakness for which I now hate and despise myself! What must she have thought of me—so false to the principles of religion and honour, so beneath her in position, so unworthy of her in every way!

But I will perplex her no longer. The one reparation I can make, I will. Thank God, she is nearly now of age, and fully prepared to do her duty to her people; and so, as you yourself say, my mission here is over. I can leave the place at once; and thus, I trust, very soon—perhaps in a few weeks—Maude Neville will almost have forgotten my existence.'

'You must do nothing hastily, my dear boy,' said the priest, laying his hand kindly on the doctor's.

'I promise that; but, after all I have said, I am sure you yourself will admit that Ballycross is no place for me. Listen, father. Out of this very bitterness has come forth a sweetness my folly has little deserved. My future is decided. I have seen a great deal more than I have told you even yet, in the long hours of silence that have passed since our last conversation. From my very childhood, second only to my love for the actual Presence of our Lord upon the Altar, has been my devotion for God's Presence in the night. In those sweet, solemn, holy hours of silence He seems to come so near that the all-pervading darkness appears to me like the folds of His garments. At times I fancy I can almost hear them rustle, as He stoops to listen to my whispered words. It was so that night; for after a while the agitation of my first discovery subsided, and little by little peace stole over my soul. Then it was that the first part of our conversation came back into my mind, and with it a thought that filled me with delight. Father, my resolution is taken—I am going to Rome!'

'To Rome, Richard!' exclaimed the priest, who began to wonder whether he was really up and awake.

‘I knew you would be astonished ; and yet, after all, this is no new idea. If it had not been for my charge here, I should have joined the Papal army long ago. If the will of God had not detained me, do you think I would have remained in comfort here while rebels were stealing the patrimony of the Church inch by inch ? Heaven forbid ! Now you, as my pastor, speaking to me with the voice of God, tell me that I am free. I believe you ; and I have therefore offered that freedom to God’s service, and He has accepted it.’

‘And if it be so, He only knows how heartily I congratulate you,’ cried Father Donovan, wringing his hand. ‘I can imagine no vocation on earth more glorious, hardly excepting the priesthood, than that of spending one’s life-blood for our Sovereign Pontiff. Truly it must have been a glorious thing to have fought for the places once sanctified by the presence of our Lord on earth ; but to me it seems a privilege far more glorious to fight for Jesus Christ Himself in the person of His Vicar. This is, of course, a very momentous step, and one that requires the very deepest consideration ; still really, as far as I can see at present, there seems to be no particular impediment in your way. We must both pray about it. At any rate, your arrangements must be, to a certain extent at least, an affair of time. You will have to find some one to succeed you here in your practice, for instance.’

‘I have thought of that ; and a week ago I sounded Fred on the subject, and feel sure I shall be able to make an arrangement with him advantageous to us both.’

‘Fred ! My nephew Fred ! My dear fellow, you have no idea how poor he is. He could not pay you what

you ought to ask for such an old-established practice as yours.'

'He will pay me quite as much as I shall care to receive; for I have property besides that I inherit from my mother. Besides, I am sure you will admit that He who has put the thought into my mind will be sure to provide the ways and means. I have faith enough to believe that. You will see that I shall start almost immediately; for, to tell you the truth, I came to the point with Fred last night, and I have half arranged matters with him already.'

'God's will be done!' ejaculated the priest, rising as he spoke and walking to the window. 'God's will be done!'

Long he stood silently looking out into the bright evening sunshine; and as he stood, a smile, quite as bright, played on his rugged features. Yet from time to time it was chased away by an expression almost sad. And was this strange? Could it be otherwise? Sincerely as Father Donovan rejoiced in Richard O'Meara's intention of fighting for the Holy See, he was only human after all, and to a human heart there is no trial more bitter than severance from a dear and long-tried friend.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RICHARD O'MEARA was right. The arrangements for his departure were very soon completed. To one as unsophisticated as the priest in business matters, it had

seemed almost incredible that so important an affair could be so soon settled ; but two or three letters to Rome and a visit to Dublin arranged everything, and by the middle of September the doctor was ready to start.

It was with mingled emotions of satisfaction and regret that O'Meara discovered, on his return from Dublin, that his friends at the Glebe House had left home during his absence, and that nothing remained but to bid them adieu through Father Donovan. Before he left a very sad succession of partings had to be gone through with the tenantry ; but very enthusiastic were they withal ; for the object of O'Meara's journey had, in some way or other, oozed out, and loth as the people of Ballycross were to part with 'their docthor,' they came of a stock that had long since learned to give their best and dearest to God, and they were not likely now to begrudge an offering for the defence of the Church they loved better than life, however highly that offering was prized. Dear as Dr. O'Meara was to them, if one word could have retained him at home, there was not a Catholic—man, woman, or child—in Ballycross that would have spoken it. And so, one golden autumn morning, with Father Donovan's blessing on his head and the blessings of all the rest hovering in the air around him, Richard O'Meara started on his holy mission.

Business connected with his new profession detained him a day in London ; not far from Maude, he well knew, for he had received the address from her uncle. When the lamps were lighted, and there was no chance of his being recognised, he sought the house, found it, and for a moment stood irresolutely before the door ; the next, he passed on his way with a firmer foot than ever, and only

bade her farewell in the depths of his own heart. The next evening, just as the setting sun was bathing old London in a flood of gold and purple, he left. As he paced the platform of the railway-station, waiting for his train, his eye encountered group after group of friends surrounding departing travellers, and for the first time in his life he longed for a kindly hand to press his, and for a loving voice to bid him God speed. An exquisite sense of loneliness took possession of him, that most desolate of all loneliness, isolation in a crowd. The train came up, and for a few minutes the bustle incident on its arrival and the care of his luggage somewhat distracted him; but no sooner did he find himself whirling on his way, locked and double-locked all alone in a carriage, than the same sense of desolation returned, and crept through every nerve and fibre of his heart. As he looked out upon the dusky buildings of the fast-retreating city, with its mazy masses of dwelling-houses and warehouses, wharves and workshops, with the mighty cupola of its cathedral towering over all, like the head of a state giant, London no longer seemed to him simply the *terra incognita* it had always been before. It was rather what a grim black casket enclosing a precious jewel would be to a man who valued that jewel more than all on earth beside, yet without the faintest hope of ever possessing it. When the last few traces of city life had disappeared, and the varied and beautiful landscapes that surround London began to unfold themselves, rich in the golden radiance of the setting sun, the calm resolution that had supported Richard O'Meara during the last few weeks vanished altogether, and doubts of every kind assailed him. His errand was quixotic, its

end a chimera, a chivalric dream, worthier of the romance of the Middle Ages than the common sense of the nineteenth century. There were Catholics enough who pronounced it such; why not believe them? And even if it were not so, why should he, more than thousands of others, be called upon to renounce the happiness of his life, and sacrifice friends, fortune, perhaps life itself, for the defence of the Holy See? 'God wills it!' cried a voice within him, irresistible as the war-cry of the ancient Crusaders; and as he listened to it, though he folded his arms and threw back his head defiantly, his nostril quivered, his breast heaved, and heavy tears forced their way through his closed eyelids, bitter almost as those that had fallen on his father's coffin. With these tears the conflict seemed to cease; for after drying his eyes quickly, ashamed of his weakness, he drew a book from his pocket and began to turn over the leaves. It was a small copy of the *Spiritual Combat*—Father Donovan's parting gift—and as his eye wandered among its beautiful truths and precepts calmness and tranquillity once more returned. At length he closed it, and once more throwing himself back in his seat, began to repeat slowly, and with the deepest devotion, the 'Veni Sancte Spiritus,' a prayer that from his earliest boyhood had been his unfailing refuge in moments of doubt and distress. Nor did He to whom it was addressed fail him in that moment of perplexity; for as the words,

'Flecte quod est rigidum,
Fove quod est frigidum,
Rege quod est devium,'

fell from his lips, the glory of his vocation, as a soldier

of the Cross, and the danger of his affection for a heretic, seemed to rise before him ; and as he gazed upon the two pictures, thankfulness, enthusiasm, and even joy once more quivered in the heart, and beamed over the countenance lately so desolate and cast down. Nor did this brightness pass away ; but the next day in Paris, before the altar of Notre Dame des Victoires, Richard O'Meara once again offered himself to the service of God in the person of His Vicar, and promised, by His grace, never again to look back from the plough on which he now laid the most willing of hands, and went on his way rejoicing.

He spent the remainder of that day in wandering about from one object of interest to another with a friend, and at his solicitation had just consented to pass the remainder of the week with him when news suddenly arrived from Rome which, though vague and uncertain, was more than sufficient to warn him that if ever true hearts and sturdy arms were needed round the Papal throne they were needed then and there. The very next train that started for Marseilles bore him to that city, whence he embarked on board a steamer for Civita Vecchia, and two days later was in Rome.

What his sentiments might have been under other circumstances at treading for the first time the hallowed soil of the Eternal City, Richard O'Meara had little leisure to consider. The evil tidings that had reached him in Paris had fallen even short of the reality, and terror and dismay were depicted on every countenance he met. Three days before his arrival, the Garibaldians had suddenly entered the Papal States at four different points, and had already possessed themselves of the strong town of Bag-

norea. On reaching the barracks, notwithstanding the excitement that prevailed there, the doctor was most warmly welcomed by the English and Irish recruits, who clustered round him in the guardroom like so many bees. But a very small amount of reflection soon convinced him that, with his ignorance of military discipline, enrolment in either the Zouaves or Dragoons at such a moment was simply out of the question. It was, however, with no little envy that he watched the evolutions of certain fine young fellows, who formed part of a detachment that had received orders to start next morning for Bagnorea with a hundred and fifty Romans of the line. Suddenly an idea struck him. He craved an audience with the commanding officer, and having obtained it, asked permission to accompany the regiment as a civilian, to assist the staff-surgeon in the ambulance, a task for which his superior surgical skill eminently qualified him. His request was granted; and after a short but sound sleep, his first experience of soldier life, he set out on his holy mission with a joy in his heart too deep for words.

But although Richard O'Meara's errand was one of mercy rather than war, he nevertheless saw more active service in that one day than many a hoary veteran in the English army sees in a whole lifetime. For scarcely had they gained the high ground that encircles Bagnorea, from which the Italians retired at their approach, when a shower of balls rained out upon them from certain vineyards in the vicinity, in which the latter had taken refuge. Unflinchingly O'Meara passed through the fiery ordeal, though many a comrade fell wounded at his side. Furiously he joined in the charge that dislodged the enemy

from their vantage-ground, and when the cowards took shelter in a neighbouring convent, he joined in the attack on the gate with the butt-end of a musket thrown away by an Italian in his flight, and was one of the first to rush in to victory. By three o'clock the town was in possession of the Papal troops, the action having lasted four hours. That night the victors rested from their toils; some in the various convents, others in the hospitable homes of the grateful townspeople. Not so the doctor, for though wearied and even slightly wounded, the night that gave rest to others only gave him fresh work. Hour after hour he passed with the patient sisters, from one groaning sufferer to another, tending Zouave and Garibaldian indiscriminately relieving their sufferings with his skilful touch, and raising their drooping spirits with his cheery voice. Not once in the proudest and happiest moments of the last nine months had so bright a smile beamed on O'Meara's face as the one that shone there that night, nor would he have relinquished his post beside those lowly pallets for any other earthly happiness that his heart could have imagined.

CHAPTER XXX.

INTERESTING as the theme of the Papal victories of 1867 undoubtedly is to every Catholic heart, it is not our purpose to pursue them any further. More than one of those who, during their course, braved the dangers of the field, and afterwards waved the sword of victory, have graphically portrayed the terrors of the one and the glory

of the other; and to attempt, after them, a description of the heroic defence of Monte Rotondo or the glorious battle of Mentana with an unsophisticated pen would be an act of unpardonable rashness.

The struggle lasted for six long weeks; and although after the first day O'Meara took no further part in the actual fighting, wherever the battle raged he was to be found untiring in his labour of love, and very often risking his life in his eagerness to remove the wounded from the scene of combat. To the intense disappointment of Garibaldi and his staff, not a single inhabitant of the invaded country joined their pretended liberators; all stood firm in their faith and loyalty to the Holy See, and at last the Piedmontese, finding their endeavours hopeless, were compelled to evacuate the Papal territories. As band after band of the disorderly rabble sneaked back to their native mountains, order and quiet were gradually restored; and when all had departed, the fervour of Italian joy and gratitude manifested itself in every town and village in every possible species of rejoicing. Then the little army that had done such great and glorious things marched back to Rome, amid the tears and prayers and *evvivas* of the rescued people. As O'Meara passed with the triumphant procession along the road leading from the Porta Pia, though weary and worn from over-exertion and long night-watches, his cheek kindled with enthusiasm, and his heart thrilled with joy, and he thanked God again and again for the future that lay before him, as one of the privileged defenders of His Vicar on earth. He looked around at the exulting throngs that lined the road; at the bright faces that smiled from carriages, and rained

down blessings from balconies; at the flowers that adorned the windows, and the gay flags and draperies that festooned the houses; and wondered what the world would say to such a living refutation of one of the blackest lies of the period. He forgot, poor fellow, that the world has a habit of denying everything it does not choose to believe, and ignoring everything it does not choose to see.

On reaching the barracks a letter was put into his hand from Father Donovan that had arrived shortly after his departure with the troops. He opened it, and with a flood of emotions far easier to imagine than to describe, read the account of Maude Neville's conversion. His first impulse was to write to her and express his delight at the news; but a very little reflection made him alter his mind, and he sent her instead a message of warm and kind congratulation through the priest.

The next day he was formally enrolled in the Papal Zouaves, and with all the ardour of his Irish temperament threw himself into the duties of his new profession. How he progressed in them may be gathered from a letter that he wrote about three months later to Father Donovan. It commenced with a glowing and elaborate description of the ceremonies of Holy Week, mingled with the tenderest expressions of admiration, affection, and devotion for the Holy Father, to whom he had just been presented. Then followed a dissertation on camp life, barrack life, and Zouave life in general. After which, it thus continued: 'You ask me if I am happy. How well I can appreciate the deep and kindly interest that prompts the question! Know then, O best of friends and most revered of fathers, I am. As I said once before, "out of

the bitter has come forth the sweet ;” for the path I chose in the bitterness of trial and disappointment has led me to a calmness and contentment I should try in vain to describe. Then, again, greatly as all must deplore the late war,—both for the sake of the wretched invaders and our own people, many of whom have suffered greatly, both in the loss of friends and property,—for myself individually it has been a blessing in disguise. For, with a rough but friendly hand, it has roused me from a sickly sentimental habit of dreaming, which I now see clearly has been to a great extent my bane all my life long. I have entered a great deal into myself lately and have made grand discoveries ; among other things, I have been startled to find how very little real good we dreamers effect, and how very much time we lose. We waste it in the morning of life, among the blossoms of a Future that may be nipped in the bud ; we waste it in the evening, over the dead leaves of a Past that can never be recalled. My God, on what a narrow isthmus between that Past and Future our real life lies ! What an atom of Eternity is that link of time we call the Present ! Yet it is all we ever have in hand to give to God’s eternal glory, to our own eternal gain. What a blighted broken life mine might have been if the Hand of God Himself had not prevented me from following the bent of my own morbid inclination ! There was a time when, if I had been circumstanced as I now am, I should have wandered away evening after evening to the most dismal ruin I could have found in all Rome. There I should have seated myself on a fragment of stone and watched the clouds chase each other across the dismal wintry sky, thinking of Maude Neville until the world

around me had grown into a dreary blank. Or else, perhaps, I should have buried my face in my hands and fancied I heard her name in the dreary rustle of the leaves and the monotonous southing of the wind, and should have felt the most enervating melancholy steal over every nerve with a sort of dismal satisfaction. I should have seen my own life in every ruined arch, my own frustrated hopes in every shattered column. Well, I am not ashamed to say that I have not forgotten Maude Neville, and I never shall. I remember her at the holy Mass, in holy Communion, and in my prayers, not dreams, on spots sanctified by miracles and hallowed by martyrdoms. But—thanks be to God!—my life is neither a blighted nor a broken one. He has changed the current of the stream; but the spring is as strong and vigorous as ever, and I trust He will direct it, in spite of all its wanderings and meanderings, to the great ocean of His love.

‘My life is a very busy one; for, in addition to my daily duties, I am studying Italian hard, and every day I visit some spot or other sacred for its Christian memories or interesting for its classical associations, often both. I spend a great deal of my time in sketching and copying frescoes, some of which I intend to mount and send you. The weather begins to improve, and we have already planned many an excursion to objects of interest in the country. How I wish you were here to act as our guide over ground so familiar to you! It is sad to be parted from everybody dear to me; but I say, from the bottom of my heart, God’s will be done! He alone knows how often I think of the “ould counthry” and all I have left behind me, even down to my poor old Bat. But the hap-

pineness of the past only sheds a halo over the peacefulness of the present; and you may tell all who care to hear of him or his fortunes that Richard O'Meara is a happy man.'

He wrote the truth; and for three bright years this happiness continued to gild a life that seemed to him a succession of glorious festivals, celebrated on the most favoured spot of earth. Yet he became no gloomy ascetic; for, notwithstanding his active duties and love of study, he found plenty of leisure to devote to his companions and their pursuits. He became a general favourite, for where almost all were good, he was one of the best; and he soon learned to use the influence he had gained over the bright young spirits around him in the cause of rectitude and honour.

One thing, and one thing only, ever ruffled the placidity of his life, and that was news from home. And yet his correspondents were only two—Father Donovan and his nephew Fred, the Ballycross doctor. Between the two little remained untold, for many a slight incident in the village that the prudence of the one would have suppressed, for fear of giving unnecessary pain, the volatile pen of the other described often in glowing language. What rainbowy things these letters were, with births, deaths, and marriages, sorrow and joy, sunshine and shadow, chequering their pages! How vividly they carry him back to his old home and his old friends, and what changes he perceives in both! Changes in the village, where he sees traces on all sides of Maude's wise head, loving heart, and bountiful hand. Changes in the churchyard, where many a fresh grave has already grown green,

and where another name—the name of Edward Neville—has been inscribed on the family vault. They tell him with what patience and resignation the rector suffered his short but severe illness; how Catholic and Protestant mourned alike at his grave; how his children still fail to realise their loss. He has learned too the surprising news that Fanny Neville has become a Catholic, and is living with Maude and Mrs. Carew at Neville Court, and that, as Harry Neville still prefers the bar to his father's profession, the Glebe House will pass to a stranger. This much from the uncle. From the nephew he has received intelligence if possible more surprising still—so surprising, indeed, that he very naturally fails to realise it in his vision; for he learns, among other things, that Miss Neville has broken the hearts of five squires in succession, that a sixth is fast coming to grief, and that the writer understands that she and Miss Fanny are going next week to ride 'cross counthry to the meet.' He learns too that Tim Murphy has had his head broken for crying 'Long life to 'the Pope, God bless him!' just outside an Orangeman's house, on the 12th of July; and that having, moreover, recently become a widower, he is 'looking afther the purtiest girl in the place with one eye, while he sheds torrents of tears from the other, over his faithful Biddy.' The last item of news on Fred's catalogue is that the Rev. David Giles is the man appointed to the Ballycross living, and that he is expected next week at the Glebe House, bag, baggage, and wife.

It is so difficult a task to weave the nephew's materials into the uncle's picture of the dear old place, that

the doctor wisely leaves them out. Besides, he knows very well from experience that he must subtract at least half from any given amount of intelligence furnished by Fred. So he laughs as heartily over the letter as the writer intended, and then, tearing it up, starts out for a stroll, singing as he goes :

‘Changes in the life of birds, for they must come and go ;
Changes in the ocean waves, for they must ebb and flow ;
Changes in the forest leaves, for they must bud and fall ;
Changes in the hearts of men—the greatest change of all.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

‘From brightening fields of ether fair disclosed,
Child of the sun, refulgent Summer comes.
In pride of youth, and felt through Nature’s depth,
He comes, attended by the sultry hours,
And ever-fanning breezes, on his way ;
While, from his ardent look, the turning Spring
Averts her blushful face, and earth and skies,
All smiling, to his hot dominion leaves.’

NEVER in the days of the poet of the *Seasons* could Summer have stolen forth from his ethereal realms more radiant in royal beauty than in 1870. Beneath ‘his hot dominion,’ so sweetly sung by him, the whole face of mighty Europe burst into a luxuriance of life and beauty. The Emerald Isle grew greener every day, the cornfields of England waxed golden beneath his smile, even Scotland decked her harsh rugged old brows with garlands. On the mountain sides of Germany and in the vineyards of Spain the grapes began to gather into family clusters

beneath the protecting leaves ; while fruits of varied form and hue and fragrance weighed down the branches, and strewed the ground, in the orchards of *la belle France*. Even the grim old pines of Norway put on a livelier green as they scattered their last year's spines to the merry little breezes that fluttered and danced around them. Flowers, growing every hour more bewitching in their loveliness, twinkled saucily everywhere, from the highest points of rocks to the deepest nooks of valleys. Vegetation ran riot in its wealth.

While Nature welcomed thus royally the coming of her lord, the world of men rejoiced in it also : the rich in the luxury of the profusion he had brought them ; the poor in the absence of pinching and penury, and the prospect of a bountiful harvest. They ate, drank, and were merry ; and though politicians whispered and financiers shook their heads, what was that to them ? They tell us that trees bow their heads before a storm, and that beasts flee to covert in the ominous silence that precedes it ; but what does the great mass of mankind know of the signs of the times ? What did half the men, women, and children of Europe think that hollow booming meant that echoed so suddenly from the German frontier ? Alas, they understood it well enough when the torrent of war, after flooding the peaceful valleys of the Rhine, ebbed back, like a retributive tide, over the length and breadth of France. She at least understood it, as war and famine decimated her people and piled her smoking plains with corpses. Before the autumn winds had scattered the red leaves on the still redder graves of the thousands who fell in the conflict, mighty changes had ploughed the face of

the countries just before so serene in their summer beauty. The events and horrors of the Franco-German war are too recent to need relating here; too well we remember that, as defeat followed defeat, and army after army fell, mowed down by the pitiless mitrailleuse and chasseur, army after army had to be re-collected out of the peaceful homes of France. Still the mighty whirlwind rolled on its way, till at last it swept into its vortex even the scanty force that the eldest daughter of the Church had given to guard the Papal throne.

Then arose another feature in the strife, the most hideous of all. Not only from the once fertile plains of France arose the din of war, but soon an echo, like a low refrain, began to be heard among the Italian hills. The storm muttered awhile, then gathered and burst. What could stem it? What were a few loyal hearts and a few stalwart arms against the hordes that now poured down under their robber-chief on the defenceless city?

The struggle was as severe as it was brief. Early in September an envoy arrived from the Sardinian court requiring his Holiness to admit certain Italian troops into Rome, under pretence of maintaining in the city an order that Victor Emmanuel knew as well as the Romans themselves had never yet been violated. What the answer of Pio Nono was to such a mandate may be well conceived by those who know how unflinchingly he guarded all the rights and privileges of the Holy See until the power to guard them was wrested by force from his sacred hands. Only three days after the embassy to the Papal court the Italians crossed the frontier prepared to do their worst. In vain a daring little band did all in its power to bar

their progress ; numbers prevailed over heroism, and the foul torrent swept on. The fifth day came, and the Italians crossed the Tiber. After forty-eight hours of portentous quiet, batteries were erected in the night by the enemy, and early next morning, eight days after they had crossed the frontier, the bombardment of Rome commenced.

The resistance was worthy of the cause that hallowed it, and the sturdy arms that fought on even when it was evident that all hope of success was over. They did their best—Zouaves, Swiss, and dragoons, merchants and artisans, the dwellers in the city and the tillers of the fields—God knows they did ; but He knows, too, that for His own wise ends, and until His own good time, it was His holy will to give His heritage to the spoiler.

By noon a terrified whisper ran through Rome that a breach had been effected in the walls ; but the fact, so far from dispiriting the defenders, only goaded their valour to fury. Like stags at bay, they stood before the opening, sword in hand, sternly resolved to struggle to the last, dreaming of no alternative but victory or death. Then it was that a low calm voice was heard from the Vatican ; but though it spoke amid the roar of cannon, the roll of musketry, and the shouts of war, it was heard ; and though it commanded the winds and waves of the angriest of human passions to cease, it was obeyed. ‘Lay down your arms ! It is enough. *Sua voluntas fiat,*’ said Pio Nono ; and a few minutes later every sword was in its scabbard, more than one wet with the tears of disappointment. What but a supernatural authority could have obtained such obedience at such a moment ? Never perhaps but once before in the whole history of the Pontificate had such a

sacrifice been demanded of her children by the Holy See. Need we point to a day, rather more than a hundred years ago, when, in a similar moment of peril, those gallant soldiers of the Church Militant, the sons of St. Ignatius, received the same command and yielded a like obedience?

That day, and from that day forward, Rome was in the hands of the enemies of God and of His Church. In no one act of his reign has the Holy Father manifested greater wisdom than in the surrender of Rome, and the moment chosen for that surrender. Not to have resisted at all would have been a tacit acquiescence in one of the most flagrant acts of injustice ever perpetrated on earth; to have continued to resist in the face of an army four times, or, according to some, even eight times, as numerous as his own, would have been a fruitless waste of his children's lives unworthy of the loving heart of Pio Nono.

The very next day train after train, crowded almost to suffocation in every compartment with Papal troops, was despatched by the Italian authorities from Ponte Galera to Civita Vecchia. One of this living freight was Richard O'Meara, too much crushed by the overwhelming sorrow of the last two days to be sensible to the discomforts of himself and his companions in misfortune. From Civita Vecchia they were transported, first in barges and then in a screw-steamer, as closely packed as the trains, to Genoa, where they were compelled to wait a fortnight (a fortnight as miserable as spare food, crowded lodgings, and scanty clothing could make it) for means of transport to their respective countries. At the end of that time the arrangements were completed; and the little band, so long and harmoniously united, were scattered like leaves before a

blast. Devious were their paths and destinies. Some passed to peaceful homes in England, Ireland, Holland, and Belgium; some to desolate hearths in Germany; soon to be rendered even more desolate still by schism and apostasy. Three or four hundred flew to the succour of their unhappy mother, France, some of whom were even destined to mingle their life-blood within a fortnight with the mighty torrent that deluged her bosom. At last all had passed away, and the gallant corps of the Papal Zouaves existed no longer. What that parting was God only knows; it was a grief too deep for utterance. But as hand grasped hand in token of undying friendship, as words died away unuttered on speechless lips, as moist eyes spoke a farewell too trying for even veteran tongues to whisper, many a hand and every heart pointed upward to that Heaven where victory even yet awaits the sons of the Church.

Three weeks later O'Meara stood on the platform of a London station, watching a fast disappearing train that bore to a long expectant mother one of his Zouave companions. Several had travelled with him from Genoa; but one by one they had left him, and this, the last, had just waved his adieu from the carriage window, and he was alone. Slowly he wended his way back to his hotel, where he stood at a window, looking down abstractedly on the moving crowds below, until the lights began to twinkle in the shops. A tap at the door at length aroused him, and a flush of real pleasure overspread his countenance when two letters were placed in his hand, one in the handwriting of Father Donovan, the other bearing the unmistakable hieroglyphics of his nephew Fred.

What new life and vigour letters from home can infuse into a human heart, even though it be the sturdy heart of a man ! In a trice half a dozen orders were given, and in less than a quarter of an hour the gaudy fire-paper had been replaced by a bright little fire, the dreary world outside was shut out, the gaslights above danced on the ea-things below, and Richard O'Meara, sinking back into a chair (the very realisation of comfort, but which he had never even noticed before), broke the seal of the priest's letter. After a page or two devoted to the subject of the Italian aggression, which O'Meara read—as the writer had written it—with flushed cheek and kindling eye, it changed its strain, and thus continued :

‘And now for a few words with regard to yourself. “Alone,” your letter complains, “in a land of strangers, who care nothing for you nor yours, and burdened with the weary weight of a life three times offered to God, and three times thrust back into your arms.” Courage, my dear boy ; watch and wait, and, believe me, God will even yet shape your life to a useful and happy end. Meantime remember your own words, written to me about three years since : “God has changed the current of the stream ; but the spring is as strong and vigorous as ever.” You even lament the competency God has given you, because, you say, it precludes the necessity for exertion. I cannot see it ; for you have only to do now as you would have done if you had not possessed it. There is work for everybody, and everywhere, even in the dainty West-end quarter where you now are, and where you seem to think that folly, fashion, and finery carry it all their own way. Nonsense ! Look closer. I will answer for it you will

see that poverty and misfortune rule the roost after all, and that for one face that flaunts along self-contained in its affluence or independence, you will find three at least that will mutely whisper, "Come and help us."

With a few more words of loving counsel, the letter concluded, and the doctor opened Fred's. It was a long and voluminous epistle; and patiently the reader waded through page after page of professional news and sporting intelligence, longing for the moment when Fred should descend from the high level of his two favourite topics to the humbler, but to him far more interesting, theme of domestic news. He reached the bottom of the second sheet. 'Now for a startling piece of news,' it concluded. But what was it? Where was it? was the question. Not on either of the sheets already read; though; he turned and twisted them a dozen ways, and read every page over again at least a dozen times. No. Fred, with his characteristic carelessness, had left the third sheet out of the letter, and the doctor, with a sigh, could only resign himself to his disappointment, and wonder, with a mixture of curiosity and interest, what the 'startling piece of news' could possibly be. Once more he read the two sheets, and was replacing them in the envelope, as unenlightened as before, when a few lines, written inside it, arrested his attention: 'I have just discovered that the Order chosen by Miss Neville for her future retirement is that of the Sisters of Mercy.' Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, Richard O'Meara could not possibly have looked whiter or more dumbfounded.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a tempestuous day, and gust after gust of a wild autumnal gale, just fresh from the broad Atlantic, was sweeping old Ireland from west to east. Perhaps among the cities and towns of busy Ulster it hushed its voice; perhaps it grew somewhat tame before it reached the low land of Leinster. But across ruffled Killarney and among the mountains of Connaught it revelled unrestrained, only sobbing itself to sleep from time to time, like a fretful child wearied with play, among the dark pine-trees that crested the hills and crowded the valleys. How it moaned round Croagh Patriot; how it blustered among the cabins of Ballycross; how it whined among the chimneys and tree-tops of Neville Court, bearing on its bosom, as it passed, shower after shower of withered leaves, that swept along the lanes and across the fields till they found a grave in the bog beyond, never to rise again! It was a cheerless scene; for the day was as dreary as driving wind, beating rain, and autumn chilliness could make it. 'Still,' thought Maude Neville, as she stepped briskly out of the lodge-gates and picked her way over a puddle, booted and waterproofed for an errand of charity, 'not what it would have been three years ago, thank God!' And she was right. For look where she might, improvement met her eye. Roads, once almost impassable, had been drained and mended; neat white cottages stood in the place of half-ruined cabins; heaps of gray stones, that for time immemorial had cumbered the ground, had once again taken the form of fences—not quite, perhaps,

so picturesque, but far more trim and tidy. Cows and sheep browsed in the fields around her; pigs, of every degree of fatness and leanness, grunted at her as she passed; and though the dug potato-patches looked desolate enough in the rain, she gladdened her eye and her heart with the mounds in the middle; for did not each whisper its happy little secret of winter provision for its owner. Bright smiles and loving reverences greeted her from every man, woman, and child she passed; and although shoes and stockings evidently ranked as articles of luxury in Neville Town, Maude knew that at Mass on Sunday not a bare foot would be seen—a pitch of prosperity rarely attained by a Connaught village. Of course much yet remained to be done; and as she passed along many a desirable reform suggested itself to her critical eye and refined taste. But, like a philosopher, she refrained from deploring evils she could not remedy; and although the ducks still continued to dabble in pools before their masters' doors, and although the pig still formed one of many a family circle, she closed her eyes and her nose to the fact, and only admired the plumpness of the one and the sagacity of the other.

But the improvements that met her eye that morning were by no means the only ones that Miss Neville had effected on her estate. For nearly two years had Father Donovan rejoiced in funds placed at his disposal, for forming clothing and burial societies, soup-kitchen and savings-bank. At Ballycross the walls of a new Catholic schoolhouse were fast rising into view, and plans had already been sent in for enlarging the church and beautifying the sanctuary. As to Mr. Colquhoun, he had never even

been seen in the village after Miss Nevill's arrival, though where he had gone to nobody knew and nobody cared. But they did know that in his place there was a kindly comical old man—a certain Mr. Laurence Reynolds—who, though a very dragon in the interests of his lady, had yet won the hearts of the whole village, a sort of rustic Bayard in his way—as lamb-like in time of peace as he was terrific in moments of war. At least so thought the children, who would eat his gingerbread and grin confidently into his face at the very moment that he was threatening their elders with the utmost terrors of the law unless the rent was paid.

And Maude herself—what of her? Had she too changed during the last three years? Her friends, had the question been proposed to them, would have replied unhesitatingly that she was 'just the same as ever;' which answer on Fanny's lips would have meant that Maude was still her model, help, and consolation, all in one. On Mrs. Barton it would have been the same as if the dear old lady had looked at you over her spectacles, and quietly enunciated the word 'Perfection.' For ourselves, we should say, that if Maude Neville was altered, it was with that indescribable sanctifying change that great sorrows and great joys stamp upon earnest characters. A sorrow certainly had been hers since last we saw her, and that too deep for words, when she had been called to stand beside the deathbed of her beloved uncle, striving to reassure herself in his good faith and in his deep contrition for the love of idleness and ease that had blemished his otherwise virtuous life. Joy, too, had she known, equally unutterable; and that when Fanny, her darling Fanny, had a

few months later embraced the Catholic religion, and when she and Mrs. Carew had stood beside the font, where the hand of Father Donovan had made her cousin one with her in faith as well as heart.

Since her father's death Fanny had resided with her, and anything happier or calmer than the life of our friends at Neville Court it would be difficult to imagine. For the happiness of each member of the little family seemed to consist in securing that of the others; and if the cousins vied with each other in showing Mrs. Carew every mark of attention that the most affectionate of daughters could render, she, on her part, watched over her charges with the tenderest solicitude of a mother. Unbounded was their confidence in each other, and little of reservation was there between them. Still 'every heart knoweth its own sorrow,' and certain it is that there are shadows on every life that even the nearest and dearest fail to understand. Not only is it true, as the moral of the mediæval legend quaintly warns us, that there is a skeleton in every house, of whose existence our neighbours are unconscious, but it is very much to be suspected that there is one in every heart also—the skeleton perhaps of something bright and beautiful that once was ours, but of which nothing now remains save these dead bones that rattle dismally enough in the winds of memory, if some unconscious hand should open by chance the door that leads to the haunted chamber. It is a fact, among many other facts no less strange than true, that, gregarious animal though man undoubtedly is, the very influences and events that affect him most deeply are often precisely those that are least perceived by the world around him.

And it is also true that, though he has learned how to unite ocean with ocean by a canal, and continent with continent by a telegraphic wire, there will ever remain a gulf, dividing soul from soul and isolating one individual from another, that neither the subtlest of human intellects nor the tenderest of human sympathies shall ever learn to bridge.

That each of our three friends had one of these grim guests lurking in a quiet corner of her soul we are assured; what they were, or whence they came, we are by no means prepared to say. We think, perhaps, that Mrs. Carew sometimes heard a gentle rattle in the November twilight when she loved to stand at the darkening window, looking out upon the rustling leaves and driving clouds. Did she wonder how, at that moment, they were driving and rustling over a little churchyard far away, where, thirty years before, she had laid the form of her gay young husband? Again we repeat we cannot tell; nor can we say whether Fanny's recent loss, or Harry's anger at her conversion, elicited those sobs that shook her bed so often in the silent night. Nor is it for us to guess why Maude herself would often rise and wander away when her friends were busy, sometimes to her mother's boudoir, sometimes to a quiet seat beside one of the stiff yew-hedges, and remain there motionless for an hour together; sometimes gazing at vacancy, sometimes watching Bat, with a look of mournful interest he could hardly appropriate, though he always wagged his tail in recognition of it.

But whatever the sources of these private griefs, not a trace of them ever intruded themselves into company.

Heart in heart and hand in hand, Mrs. Carew and her children passed on their peaceful way ; and whether they made calls or received them, visited the poor or nursed the sick, worked, read, played, or chatted, a happier trio than the ladies of Neville Court it would have been difficult to find.

After sundry well-contested battles with the wind for her umbrella Maude reached her destination, a small and somewhat untidy cabin on the road to Ballycross, in which the mother of a numerous family lay sick. After a little friendly chat with the sufferer, whose infant she washed and dressed, and for whom she warmed some of the chicken-broth she had brought, as skilfully as an old nurse, Maude set out on her road home. Fortunately Tim Murphy's well-intended, but somewhat characteristic, wish had not been granted, that, 'plaze God, the wind might change as her leddyship wint home ;' but with her enemy at her back Maude now tripped lightly along, her empty basket on her arm, and her face as bright as health and exercise could make it.

The rain ceased after luncheon, and then Fanny, accompanied by Mrs. Carew, set off for a drive to the Glebe House. Under any circumstances a visit to the dear old house would have been a very sad one to the poor child ; under the present it was sadder than words could express. For Fred Donovan's piece of information had, in this instance, been true, and the Rev. David Giles, through the interest of his wife's friends, had obtained the living of Ballycross. Yet, painful as it always was to both Fanny and Maude to see such a man in Mr. Neville's place, a visit to the Glebe House had an attraction for

them that drew them thither almost every day, and that attraction, strange to say, was no other than aunt Barbara. Bitterly indeed had that unfortunate woman rued the day on which she had taken David Giles 'for better for worse.' Not more effectually had Petruchio himself tamed his shrew than this relentless little tyrant had subjugated his ; but with this difference between himself and Shakespeare's hero, that whereas the latter had been content with breaking his Katherine's spirit, he had proceeded systematically to break his Barbara's heart, and that with the weapon she herself offered him, her blind infatuation. Had it not been for the daily visit from Neville Court, he would doubtless have succeeded. As it was, the poor cowed soul lived on from day to day in the sunshine of the bright young hearts that, forgetting the past, did all in their power to comfort her. It was a truly piteous sight to see the gaunt and once unyielding form of the aged woman cling to her young protectors. Giles saw it, and in his impotent wrath hated them from his heart. Had they been other than what they were very soon would he have forbidden them his house, and barred and barricaded his doors had they persisted. But self-interest possessed a golden key that could have marched straight through into the centre of David Giles's very heart had the enterprise been worth the trouble. Before the face of that mighty goddess David humbled himself to the earth. With an obsequious smile, and at her bidding, he bowed his visitors to their carriage, though he invariably walked back to the house with a snarl, and revenged himself upon his helpless wife. Did one fragment of her love for him survive this treatment? In all probability, yes. Heaven only

knows, for Heaven alone can fathom the mysterious depths of woman's affection.

Although the weather had cleared up sufficiently to allow Mrs. Carew and Fanny to take their drive, the afternoon continued so damp and chilly that, as Maude sat at work in the long drawing-room, she felt half inclined to order a fire, and that in the face of Mrs. Barton's terrible warning that 'to begin fires so soon would make the winter seem half as long again.' Even Bat shivered, and grunting and groaning, rolled himself up like a gigantic hedgehog, as though endeavouring to fence himself against the melancholy influence of the atmosphere. Nor was the scene without more exhilarating. A severe hard look seemed to have stolen over the few geraniums that still remained in flower; while the leaves that rained down without intermission from the broad-branched sycamore that had so lately cast its delicious summer shadow over the window made all the beds in their vicinity a picture of desolation. Dampness and dreariness had it all their own way, for as to the chrysanthemums, so far from enlivening the scene with their brilliancy, they only seemed to enhance its dismalness, as they laughed and nodded, like so many jaunty undertakers, in the midst of the death and desolation around them.

A handsome piece of needlework was stretched in a frame before Miss Neville; but though a bunch of leaves was beginning to grow out of the canvas in the most tempting manner possible, beneath her skilful fingers, she seemed to be very little interested in her work. For ever and anon she would pause and gaze into vacancy with a strange wistful look in her eyes, and twice she even laid

down her needle, and burying her face in her hands, burst into tears. She was just recovering from the second of these paroxysms, when Bat started up, shook himself, listened, gave a short sharp snort, half bark and half cry, and then, with a spring that scattered the contents of his mistress's workbasket right and left, bounded from the room.

'Bat, Bat!' cried Maude, springing from her chair in great alarm, thinking her huge favourite must be going mad; but no Bat appeared. Just at that moment, however, a peal at the ponderous door-bell awoke every echo in the sleepy house into a chorus of repetitions, and the moment after a firm footfall traversed the vestibule and passed along the passage. The next, old Mills appeared at the drawing-room door, and with him one whose face, although bronzed and weatherbeaten, was strangely familiar.

'Dr. O'Meara!'

In vain he tried to reach her, for master Bat, conceiving himself to have, not only a prior but an exclusive, right on his old master's attentions, pertinaciously held them asunder by a series of leaps at the doctor's chin.

'Down, Bat, down! Good dog! there, there, that will do!' But not so thought Bat, and it was not until his raptures had somewhat subsided, that anything like a salutation could take place between his old master and his new mistress. It was well perhaps as it was, for it softened a greeting that might otherwise have been a somewhat restricted one on both sides. A merry laugh signalised the meeting of the long-severed hands when they did meet, and the ice once broken, after a few preliminary questions

and replies, they sat down and chatted away, just as they had down, in that same room that first evening, four years ago.

He had much to tell her about Rome, much to ask and hear about Ballycross; and Maude listened and talked with the simplicity natural to her. She spoke of her own conversion, of Mrs. Carew, and of her happiness in her people. But though she described her arrival at Neville Court, and told him how well Fred Donovan had managed the fête given on the occasion, she did not tell him how spiritless and dull that fête had seemed to her without him. Then sadly and softly she spoke of her uncle's death, of his children's grief, and of poor aunt Barbara's miserable life at the Glebe House. At last she could remember nothing more to tell him, and then the conversation turned once again to Rome.

'Poor Zouaves!' said Maude, shaking her head sadly, as the doctor concluded a description of the final struggle. 'Poor Zouaves and poor dear holy Father! Can nothing more be done to help him?'

'Yes, by our prayers, but no longer with the arms of this world, or Richard O'Meara would not be here,' he replied.

'When did you arrive at Ballycross?' she asked, after a short pause.

'One hour since. I called on Father Donovan on my way from the station, but found him out. So I sent my baggage on to the old place to gladden Betty's eyes, and dropped in here.'

'Then if you have only just arrived, I daresay you have not heard a somewhat surprising piece of news,' said Maude mysteriously.

‘Yes, I have,’ he replied, stooping suddenly to caress Bat; ‘that is to say if the news you mean has reference to a convent,’ he added, in a tremulous voice.

‘That is what I do mean; were you not surprised to hear it?’

‘Need you ask?’ he replied, in a manner so strangely unlike himself that she glanced at him in astonishment. The fact was, he had found her so thoroughly unchanged, so completely the Maude Neville of old, that he had begun to think that the report he had heard must have been untrue, and this sudden confirmation of it from her own lips was too much for his self-possession.

‘It would be hard to say,’ he continued, ‘whether the event itself, or the suddenness with which it seems to have been arranged, surprised me most.’

‘Yes; it has been sudden, certainly,’ she replied; ‘very sudden indeed at the last; and then there is always such a combination of sunshine and shadow in these things. Still, it seems to me that the shadows on religious life must be slight in comparison to its brightness. Of course I know the parting will be hard when the moment comes, but I feel very happy nevertheless.’

There was a short silence, during which the doctor played abstractedly with Bat’s ears, while Maude looked out upon the dreary flower-beds.

‘Very few of the people about here seem to look upon the fact of a woman giving herself to God as brightly as I do,’ she continued; ‘and I am very glad that such a sunny event as a wanderer’s return should be associated with it. I expect all Ballycross will go mad with delight at seeing you again, for every one seems to have missed you

sadly since you left. I have received a letter from the convent this morning,' she added, 'fixing next Monday for our journey, so you see you have just come in time to take my post. Poor Mr. Reynolds! he is precisely the right man in the right place, generally speaking; but I do not fancy he possesses the qualities necessary to meet the various little exigencies that occasionally occur on such an estate as this, without a stronger will than his own at the helm.'

'I should imagine not,' replied the doctor; 'and it is for this reason, and for this reason alone, that I am here. I had made arrangements to pass the winter in London; but when I heard of your—that is to say of this, I came straight off at once.'

Again she looked at him as though much surprised, but without noticing it, he continued,

'You must possess the virtue of detachment in a high degree, Miss Neville, to be able to contemplate the future as calmly as you do.'

'I am afraid not, Dr. O'Meara,' she answered, with a quiet smile. 'You see me now that I have grown accustomed to the thought of this, but at first it was a heavy trial, I can assure you. The departure of one from the happy little circle that Mrs. Carew, Fanny, and I have formed lately could not fail to be painful to every one of us. Still I am certain, yes, quite certain, that the step is a right one, though I can see you do not think so;' and she looked at him inquiringly.

'Excuse me, Miss Neville; but as I am perfectly aware that, whatever my sentiments on the subject may be, they will not, and indeed ought not to, affect the question at

issue, you must suffer them to remain locked in my own breast.'

There was a quiver of intense emotion in his voice as he spoke, and the young girl looked at him as though petrified with astonishment.

'I have come here to-day,' he said at length, 'to offer my services in what I know must be an hour of need. But, whether or no I sympathise with your design, Heaven forbid that I should be guilty of the rashness of either encouraging you to advance, or of advising you to retrace your steps. These things lie in the hands of God alone, and may not be judged by the laws of our ordinary judgment. That He should call you from duties and responsibilities He Himself had imposed upon you to another sphere of action and duty is naturally a mystery to me; but I bow in mute respect. From what I know of your character, I am certain you would not act as you are about to act, unless you had assured yourself beyond a doubt that such is God's holy will.'

During the first part of this speech Maude's eyes had opened wider than ever. As he proceeded, however, an idea seemed suddenly to strike her; and she bowed her head over her frame, and began to stitch away diligently at the green leaves. As she did so, a smile played unseen upon her features, strangely at variance with the solemnity of his address.

'You speak of the step you are about to take,' he continued, after a short pause, 'as of one that will be a trial to you; but I am certain, as your sensitive heart compares the prosperity of the present with the misery endured by your unfortunate tenants in the past, such a mode of expression

tamely renders the martyrdom your poor divided heart must be suffering. You have given me to understand that my return is a comfort to you; suffer me, then, to console you still more by assuring you that I return once more ready to bow my back to the burden, and to do my utmost to supply your place as in times gone by. God only knows if I did right in leaving! Perhaps if I had stayed—'

'Things might have been very different,' broke in Maude, whose eyes were now fairly brimful of something very nearly akin to merriment. 'If you had stayed and helped us, doctor, as you did in the days of Colquhoun, everything might have been different. Why did you go away?'

'Why? Because—' and his voice grew suddenly so passionate that Maude began to tremble and to wish she had not asked the question—'because I dared not stay. O Miss Neville,' he continued, now fairly carried away by his excitement, 'I little thought the day would come when I should tell you this! If you had remained in the world, it would have been buried till death in my heart; but since you yourself have asked me for the reason, and since you are going where we shall never, never meet again, I must and will tell you why I turned away just at the moment that you had learned to look to me for help in your perplexities. I left—' he paused—'I left because I found that the lady of Neville Court was growing dearer to Richard O'Meara than a rich and beautiful heiress ought to grow to a poor and honourable man. Dear Miss Neville, it was presumption, it was madness, I know; but I could not help it. Directly I discovered my

weakness, I forsook the temptation, and had not your own interest seemed now to demand my presence never would I have appeared before you again. Farewell for ever! In your convent home think of your tenantry as watched over by your guardian angel, and as happy as you would wish them to be in the happiness your own dear hand has procured for them during your brief but bright sojourn here. As to Richard O'Meara, forgive and forget him! Once more, farewell!

He rose as he spoke, and advanced towards the spot where she sat, no longer smiling, but pale as death. Before, however, he could reach her, the door flew suddenly open, and Fanny Neville, looking very much pleased and surprised, hurried into the room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'THE very last person in the world I should have expected to see, Dr. O'Meara,' exclaimed the little intruder, as she shook hands warmly with her father's old friend and favourite. 'We heard from Father Donovan that you had left Rome; but for all that, I thought you were far, far away. But what is the matter? you look quite ill!'

She might have asked the same question of Maude, who was vainly trying to hide her embarrassment by making additions to the green leaves certainly never contemplated by the designer.

The doctor muttered something about a fatiguing journey.

‘I am very pleased to see you,’ said Fanny, looking from one to the other as she spoke with a somewhat mystified air; ‘very pleased indeed. Strange! It was only this morning I was saying how sorry I felt at not bidding you good-bye before I left.’

‘Do you purpose leaving Ballycross, then?’ asked the doctor, with as much of his usual manner as he could command.

‘I do, indeed; has not Maude told you? Well, she might have done so, for it is no longer a secret. I am going next week to the Sisters of Mercy.’

‘What, both!’ exclaimed the doctor.

‘No, not both,’ cried Fanny, laughing; ‘that would be too much of a good thing. No, Maude is going to take me and Mrs. Carew too, and they will stay some weeks in Dublin, perhaps even till I am “clothed;” but Maude has no idea of being a nun herself, have you, Maudie dear?’

She turned as she spoke, but Maude had already vanished. Had he lost his identity, or was he really and truly Richard O’Meara still? the doctor asked himself. The room seemed to swim round with him, and Fanny Neville to move and speak like a figure in a dream. When Mrs. Carew entered the room, and having been introduced to him, pressed him to stay to dinner, so little capable was the doctor of framing a polite refusal, that he was obliged to say yes in spite of himself.

At last the dressing-bell rang, the two ladies retired, and the doctor was left alone. But it was not for long; for in less than ten minutes Father Donovan, who had heard of his arrival, made his appearance. He was soon

after followed by Fred, who, just an hour too late, produced the missing sheet of his letter, telling them that he had only that morning discovered it on his writing-table. He handed it to the doctor, who found therein the full account of Miss Fanny Neville's intention to forsake the world, though the writer had left the announcement of the Order she had selected for his P.S. on the envelope. Little did Fred imagine, as he watched the doctor quietly trying to decipher his *griffonnage* in the fast-waning light, what his carelessness had cost his friend, and certainly O'Meara had no wish to enlighten him.

As soon as Fanny's toilette—never a very elaborate one—was completed, she hurried to Maude's room. After tapping gently, she entered, and found her cousin slowly pacing the floor, trying to recover some part, at least, of her wonted equanimity. Gently Fanny called her by her name, and stole her arm round her waist; but Maude's only reply was a burst of tears.

'Maudie darling,' whispered Fanny, more softly still, 'what is the matter?' I cannot tell you how I have been longing to ask you; but I was afraid to come in. Why did you run out of the drawing-room so quickly?'

There was no answer.

'Listen, Maudie. Hitherto we have had no secrets from each other. Shall we begin now—now that we have only three more short days to spend together? Will you not tell me what it is that grieves you, and let me comfort you for the last, last time?'

Who could resist such a petition, especially as the little pleader enforced it with kiss after kiss? Certainly not Maude; and, seated on a sofa, veiled by the quiet

twilight, she whispered the story of her conversation with the doctor.

‘Poor Dr. O’Meara!’ said Fanny, as she concluded. ‘Do you know, Maudie, I always suspected this. You may depend upon it, darling, that was the reason he left Ballycross so suddenly. I understand it all now.’

‘Yes,’ said Maude faintly; ‘he says so himself.’

‘Poor Dr. O’Meara!’ repeated Fanny. ‘Well, Maudie, you ought to feel highly honoured. I have never in my life met a man who so perfectly realises my ideal of what a man should be. How truly I wish you could return his affection! But I suppose these things are beyond our power to control.’

The head beside her bowed so very low, and the clasp on her arm was tightened so suddenly, that a light broke upon Fanny, notwithstanding the increasing darkness.

‘I cannot imagine,’ she continued, after a short pause, ‘how you can be indifferent to him; and to tell you the truth, Maudie, I do not think you are. I begin to suspect that you like the doctor quite as much as he likes you.’

Once more there was silence; but though the grasp on her arm grew tighter than ever, Fanny tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the face beside her.

‘After all, though,’ she observed at length, ‘I suppose in these days the worth of a man and the direction of a woman’s affections are only looked upon as dust in the balance. Whom Maude Neville loves or does not love signifies little. It is the proud, rich, and beautiful heiress of Neville Court who has to be considered; and she looks upon Richard O’Meara as in every way unworthy of her.’

A sarcasm from the sweet lips of Fanny Neville was something so unusual that its very novelty gave it effect. No sooner were the words uttered than an indignant repudiation of such sentiments burst from her cousin's lips. It was followed by a speech, very incoherent certainly, and yet in sum and substance the same as Portia's, declaring that

‘for him

She would be trebled twenty times herself ;
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
More rich ;’

and yet, even then, consider that she had given nothing, or very little, in return for the treasure of such a man's affection.

What more she might have said was suddenly cut short by the dinner-bell ; and after bathing her eyes, and applying a little friendly *poudre de riz* to certain tell-tale marks on her cheeks and brow, Maude descended, with her usual quiet and stately step, to the dining-room. As may well be imagined, there was plenty to talk about, and as there were four persons to maintain the conversation, three of whom were in excellent spirits, besides Maude and the doctor, the unusual abstraction of the two latter passed unnoticed. Both, however, were greatly relieved when Mrs. Carew rose ; and as soon as the ladies found themselves outside the dining-room door, Maude hurried away from the others, ran up-stairs, and again took refuge in her own room. Such unusual conduct naturally excited Mrs. Carew's attention, and as soon as they had reached the drawing-room, Fanny told her all. She had just finished her story when the object of it entered the room,

looking very calm and quiet, though exceedingly pale ; and a few minutes after, the sound of approaching footsteps told them that the gentlemen had risen from table, and were about to join them.

‘Never in my life have I seen a more lovely moonlight evening,’ exclaimed Father Donovan, as, followed by his nephew and O’Meara, he entered the drawing-room. ‘Truly to-night we may say “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament His handiwork!” Notwithstanding all the lights that are burning at this end of the room, it shines quite plainly through the white blinds at the other ; you must all come and look at it ;’ and as he spoke he crossed the room and drew one of the blinds up. They all followed him as he had desired, and for a few moments stood grouped round the window, looking out upon the landscape that stretched away before them, beautiful as dreamland in its soft silver radiance.

Maude, who was longing to get away from everybody in the world, was the first to steal out of the circle, and Fanny soon followed and seated herself beside her. She had just proposed a game of chess, thinking it might serve to divert her cousin’s thoughts from the subject that engrossed them, when Father Donovan approached and asked Maude to play him that beautiful little impromptu that had charmed him so much. She rose to comply with his request, and in a moment the moonlight and everything else were forgotten by Fred, who was an ardent lover of music, and who, the instant he heard his uncle’s words, bounded across the room and opened the piano. As we have already said, Maude was an exquisite performer, and her listeners, at whose request she played

piece after piece, stood beside the piano, one of them at least lost in admiration. Not so Richard O'Meara; for though Maude played a piece so well remembered that its plaintive melody had often haunted him during the last three years, so insensate did he seem to have grown that he never even turned his head or gave the slightest indication of attention. With his arms folded and his head slightly bent he stood in the calm white rays of the moonlight, so still that, had not the quiver of his lips betrayed the deep emotions struggling in his breast, one might have said he was the statue of a man.

'Dr. O'Meara,' said a gentle voice beside him.

He turned and started, for he thought they had all long since left the window and that he was standing there alone.

'Dr. O'Meara,'—and, as he turned, the soft dark eyes of Mrs. Carew looked into his,—I wish to say a few words to you about something you said to Maude this afternoon.'

For an instant the doctor drew himself up, and an almost haughty expression curled his lip that seemed to say, if he had committed himself, he would not be called to account for it by a third person. In an instant, however, the emotion had passed away, and the doctor, bowing his head in reply to her, quietly waited for what was to follow.

'You will, I fear, consider it strange that I should thus allude to a matter that I know must be a very painful one; but I do so because I see that thus alone I can prevent a serious misunderstanding. I hear from Fanny that you gave Maude to understand this afternoon that

she has long been the object of your deepest affections. Will you tell me in plain candid terms what the barrier is that lies between you ?

‘My dear Mrs. Carew, need you ask ?’ cried the doctor. ‘What have I to offer Miss Neville in exchange for all that she is and has ? A many-sided barrier of disparity lies between us, to say nothing of a still greater one—her indifference to me.’

‘Supposing both these barriers could be removed,’ suggested Mrs. Carew, with a smile that the doctor felt inclined to resent as misplaced and tantalising in the extreme.

‘Forgive me if I say that such a supposition is simply an idle one.’

‘Still, for supposition’s sake, let me make it,’ returned Mrs. Carew, with the same smile.

‘Then of course you insist on supposing a happiness too great for words to utter or for—’ His voice became suddenly choked with emotion and he could say no more.

‘I am afraid you are beginning to think that I have sought you only to trouble you, Dr. O’Meara ; but you must believe better things of me,’ said Mrs. Carew kindly. ‘First of all let me say that, with regard to your first barrier, it is nothing more nor less than a myth. Hush ! I know what I am saying,’ she continued, as the doctor tried to interrupt her. ‘You must first hear what I have to tell you, and then I will let you say what you choose. Four years ago, when Mr. Neville and Maude were visiting me in London, he and I had many conversations about her, and one morning he startled me by the following speech. “It seems to me that every member of our

family is at the present moment on the *qui-vive* to find a suitable match for Maude. What they are in such a hurry for, I cannot imagine. I am sure at present the poor child is much better as she is; but their ideas are very different from mine. I should like to see her married to a good, plain, sensible man, who would take the estate in hand, as my brother Sir Morcar did, and make it what it was in his time. Now, with them, the great point is either rank or wealth, the *summum bonum* both combined. To judge by the specimens they have lately proposed to me, I should say that my relations must have been searching the highways and byways of society for rich and well-born rascals. Fortunately the child is in her old uncle's care, and with his consent she shall have none of them. Her father married for love, why should not she?" He then proceeded: "There is a man living at Ballycross that, were it not for his religion, is just the one I would choose for her husband. He is very good, highly intelligent, and reaches, in short, my standard of a man. His descent is as good as her own, for he comes of a good old Catholic family that once owned a far wider domain than hers, but whose attachment to their religious faith made them poor, and afterwards kept them so. He is certainly not rich, but what does Maude want with money? It is, to my mind—and so it was to my brother's—one of the greatest privileges of wealth, that it allows its possessor to wed without an eye to the main chance, as it is called, and, unfortunately, too often is, in these degenerate days. I like sometimes to fancy this marriage, though it is only the idle dream of a foolish old man. For it could never take place unless O'Meara would turn Protestant; and

you might just as soon expect Croagh Patrick to pay London a visit. She should not have him without, for I hold mixed marriages in utter abhorrence, as the fruitful source of every evil; but if their religion were the same, and Maude liked him, if I had my will Dr. Richard O'Meara should be her husband." Here Mrs. Carew paused, for Maude's music had suddenly died away to a symphony so soft and low that it was difficult to speak without being overheard. After a time the player struck up a grand triumphant march, and Mrs. Carew continued. 'It seems to me that words such as these, spoken by one who was Maude's legal guardian and natural protector, are more than sufficient to justify me in saying that your first barrier was a myth. Of the second you mention, I can of course say nothing. Whether or no it exists, you must learn from the lips of Maude herself. I think I need hardly advise you to learn your fate as soon as possible, or remind you of the old adage, "faint heart never won fair lady."' "

The rapid revulsion of feeling experienced by Richard O'Meara during Mrs. Carew's speech might have been read in the change of his countenance. We leave both to the imagination of our readers, as also what he might have said in reply had time and opportunity been given him. His answer was destined to be nipped in the bud; for with his usual ill-luck just at this moment that unfortunate Fred Donovan blundered in upon the conversation, to ask the doctor what he thought of 'that glorious thing Miss Neville had just played.' Perhaps, however, after all, neither Mrs. Carew nor the doctor very much regretted the interruption. For the former had said quite as much

as she intended, and certainly the latter had heard more than sufficient for one night's reflections. He soon after took his leave, on the excuse of the fatigue consequent on his journey; not, however, before he had whispered to Mrs. Carew that he should certainly call next morning.

He was as good as his word; for about noon he presented himself, and with an unusual flush on his cheek and a strange light in his eye asked for Miss Neville. Again he was shown into the long drawing-room, and again he and Maude had a conference, all to themselves, but with a very different result from that of the day before; for at the end of half an hour the doctor suddenly made his appearance, with the most radiant countenance possible, in the room where Mrs. Carew and Fanny were sitting, and marching straight up to the former shook both her hands, and kissed both her cheeks, and called her 'mother.' His entrance was the signal for Fanny to vanish, and in a moment she was by her cousin's side in the drawing-room. She had come prepared to ask a momentous question, but she had no need to ask it. Something she saw at a first glance was answer sufficient to it at once, for on one of the fingers of Maude's pretty white hand gleamed the diamond-ring that Richard O'Meara had always worn in memory of his mother.

* * * * *

One fine summer morning, in the year of grace 1871, a very simple wedding took place in Ballycross. Homely were the festivities, unostentatious the toilettes, and the bridegroom by no means either handsome, rich, or young. And yet, as the blushing bride, leaning on the arm of her happy husband, stepped from the porch of the little church

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